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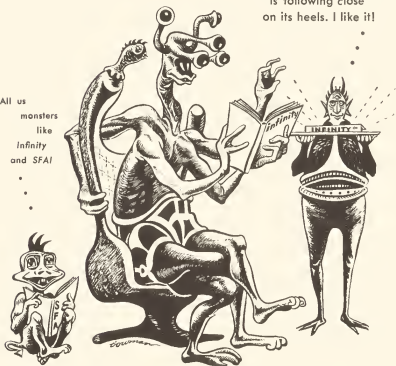
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...and 'pon my soul, Fortesque!

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monsters
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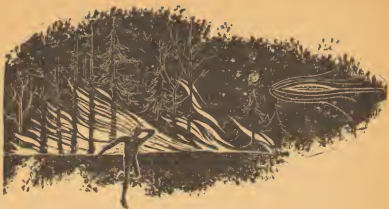
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BMS



Deeper Than The Darkness

by HARLAN ELLISON

Controlled, his weird

power might have

been a blessing—un-

controlled, it made his

life a literal, flaming hell!

Illustrated by EMSH

CHAPTER I

THEY CAME to Alf Gunnerson in the Pawnee County jail.

He was sitting, hugging his bony knees, against the plasteel wall of the cell. On the plasteel floor lay an ancient, three-string mandolin he had borrowed from the deputy, and had been plunking with some talent off and on all that hot, summer

day. Under his thin buttocks the empty trough of his mattressless bunk curved beneath his weight. He was an extremely tall man, even hunched up that way.

He was a gaunt, empty-looking man. His hair fell lanky and drab and gray-brown in disarray over a low forehead. His eyes seemed to be peas, withdrawn from their pods and placed in a starkly white face.

Their blankness only accentuated the total cipher he seemed. There was no inch of expression or recognition on his face, or in the line of his body. He seemed to be a man who had given up the Search long ago.

He was more than tired-looking, more than weary. His was an internal weariness. His face did not change its hollow stare at the plasteel-barred door opposite, even as it swung back to admit the two nonentities.

The two men entered, their stride as alike as the unobtrusive gray mesh suits they wore, as alike as the faces that would fade from memory moments after they had turned. The turnkey—a grizzled country deputy with a minus 8 rating—stared after the men with open wonder on his bearded face.

One of the gray-suited men turned, pinning the wondering stare to the deputy's face. His voice was calm and untripped. "Close the door and go back

to your desk." The words were cold and paced. They brooked no opposition. It was obvious: the men were Mindees.

The roar of a late afternoon inverspace ship split the waiting moment, outside; then the turnkey slammed the door, palming its loktite. He walked back out of the cell block, hands deep in his coverall pockets. His head was lowered as though he were trying to solve a complex problem. It, too, was obvious: he was trying to block his thoughts off from those goddamned Mindees.

WHEN HE was gone, the telepaths circled Gunnerson slowly. Their faces altered, softly, subtly, and personality flowed in. They shot each other confused glances.

Him? the first man thought, nodding slightly at the still, knee-hugging prisoner.

That's what the report said, Ralph. The other man removed his forehead-concealing snapbrim and sat down on the edge of the bunk-trough. He touched Gunnerson's leg with tentative fingers. *He's not thinking, for God's sake!* the thought flashed. *I can't get a thing.*

Shock sparkled in the thought.

He must be blocked off by trauma-barrier, came the reply from the telepath named Ralph.

"Is your name Alf Gunnerson?" the first Mindee inquired softly, a hand on Gunnerson's shoulder.

The expression never changed. The head swivelled slowly and the dead eyes came to bear on the dark-suited telepath. "I'm Gunnerson," he replied briefly. His tones indicated no enthusiasm, no curiosity.

The first man looked up at his partner, doubt wrinkling in his eyes, pursing his lips. He shrugged his shoulders, as if to say, *Who knows?*

He turned back to Gunnerson.

Immobile, as before. Hewn from rock, silent as the pit.

"What are you in here for, Gunnerson?" He spoke the halting speech of the telepath, as though he were unused to words.

The dead stare swung back to the plasteel bars. "I set the woods on fire," he said shortly.

The Mindee's face darkened at the prisoner's words. That was what the report had said. The report that had come in from this remote corner of the country.

The American Union covered two continents with plasteel and printed circuits, relays and fast movement, but there were areas of backwoods country that had never taken to civilizing. They still maintained roads and jails,

fishing holes and forests. Out of one of these had come three reports, spaced an hour apart, with startling ramifications—if true. They had been snapped through the primary message banks in Capital City in Buenos Aires, reeled through the computers, and handed to the Bureau for checking. While the inverspace ships plied between worlds, while Earth fought its transgalactic wars, in a rural section of the American continents, a strange thing was happening.

A mile and a half of raging forest fire, and Alf Gunnerson the one responsible. So the Bureau had sent two Mindees.

"How did it start, Alf?"

The dead eyes closed momentarily in pain, then opened, and he answered, "I was trying to get the pot to heat up. Trying to set the kindling under it to burning. I fired myself too hard." A flash of self-pity and unbearable hurt came into his face, disappeared just as quickly. Empty once more, he added, "I always do."

The first man exhaled sharply, got up and put on his hat. The personality flowed out of his face. He was a carbon-copy of the other telepath once more. They were no longer individuals; they were Bureau men, studiously, exactly, precisely alike in every detail.

"This is the one," he said.

"Come on, Alf," the Mindee named Ralph said. "Let's go."

The authority of his voice no more served to move Gunnderson than their initial appearance had. He sat as he was. The two men looked at one another.

What's the matter with him? the second one flashed.

If you had what he's got—you'd be a bit buggy yourself, the first one replied.

They hoisted the prisoner under his arms, lifted him unresisting, off the bunk. The turnkey came at a call, and—still marveling at these men who had come in, shown Bureau cards, sworn him to deadly silence, and were now taking the tramp firebug with them—opened the cell door.

As they passed before him, the telepath named Ralph turned suddenly sharp and piercing eyes on the old guard. "This is government business, mister," he warned. "One word of this, and you'll be a prisoner in your own jail. Clear?"

The turnkey bobbed his head quickly.

"And stop thinking, mister," the Mindee added nastily, "we don't like to be referred to as slimy peckers!" The turnkey turned a shade paler and watched silently as they disappeared down the hall, out of the Pawnee County jailhouse. He waited, blanking fiercely, till he heard

the whine of the Bureau solocab rising into the afternoon sky.

Now what the devil did they want with a crazy firebug hobo like that? He thought viciously, *goddam Mindees!*

AFTER THEY had flown him to Buenos Aires, deep in the heart of the blasted Argentine desert, they sent him in for testing.

The testing was exhaustive. Even though he did not really co-operate, there were things he could not keep them from learning, things that showed up because they were there:

Such as his ability to start fires with his mind.

Such as the fact that he could not control the blazes.

Such as the fact that he had been bumming for fifteen years in an effort to find peace and seclusion.

Such as the fact that he had become a tortured and unhappy man because of his strange mind-power . . .

"Alf," said the bodiless voice from the rear of the darkened auditorium, "light that cigarette on the table. Put it in your mouth and make it light, Alf. Without a match."

Alf Gunnderson stood in the circle of light. He shifted from leg to leg on the blazing stage, and eyed the cylinder of white paper on the table.

He was trapped in it again. The harrying, the testing, the staring. He was different—even from the other accredited psioid types—and they would try to put him away. It had happened before, it was happening now. There was no real peace for him.

"I don't smoke," he said, which was not true. But this was brother kin to the uncountable police line-ups he had gone through, all the way across the American continents, across Earth, to A Centauri IX and back. It annoyed him, and it terrified him, for he knew he could not escape.

Except this time there were no hard rocky-faced cops out there in the darkness beyond his sight. This time there were hard, rocky-faced Bureau men and SpaceCom officials.

Even Terrence, head of SpaceCom, was sitting in one of those pneumoseats, watching him steadily.

Daring him to be what he was!

He lifted the cylinder hesitantly, almost put it back. "Smoke it, Alf!" snapped a different voice, deeper in tone, from the ebony before him.

He put the cigarette between his lips. They waited.

He wanted to say something, perhaps to object, but he could not. Alf Gunnederson's heavy brows drew down. His blank

eyes became—if it were possible—even blanker. A sharp, denting V appeared between the brows.

The cigarette flamed into life.

A tongue of fire leaped up from the tip. In an instant it had consumed tobacco, paper, and de-nicotizer in one roar. The fire slammed against Gunnederson's lips, searing them, lapping at his nose, his face.

He screamed, fell on his face and beat at the flames with his hands.

Suddenly the stage was clogged with running men in the blue and charcoal suits of the SpaceCom. Gunnederson lay writhing on the floor, a wisp of chairry smoke rising from his face. One of the SpaceCom officials broke the cap on an extinguisher vial and the spray washed over the body of the fallen man.

"Get the Mallaport! Get the goddammed Mallaport, willya!" A young ensign with brush-cut blond hair, first to reach the stage, as though he had been waiting crouched below, cradled Gunnederson's head in his muscular arms, brushing with horror at the flakes of charred skin. He had the watery blue eyes of the spaceman, the man who has seen terrible things; yet his eyes were more frightened now than any man's eyes had a right to be.

In a few minutes the angular,

spade-jawed, Malleable-Transporter was smoothing the skin on Gunnederson's face, realigning the atoms—shearing away the burned flesh, coating it with vibrant, healthy pink skin.

Another few moments and the psiod was finished. The burns had been erased; Gunnederson was new and whole, save for the patches of healthier-seeming skin that dotted his face.

All through it he had been murmuring. As the Mallaport finished his mental work and stood up with a sigh, the words filtered through to the young SpaceCom ensign. He stared at Gunnederson a moment, then raised his watery blue eyes to the other officials standing about.

He stared at them with a mixture of fear and bewilderment.

Gunnederson had been saying: "Let me die, please let me die, I want to die, won't you let me die, please . . ."

CHAPTER II

THE SHIP was heading toward Omalo, sun of the Delgarth system. It had been translated into inverspace by a Driver named Carina Correia. She had warped the ship through, and gone back to her deep-sleep, till she was needed at Omalo snap-out.

Now the ship whirled through the crazy-quilt of inverspace, cutting through to the star-system of Earth's adversary.

Gunnederson sat in the cabin with the brush-cut blond ensign. All through the trip, since blast-off and snap-out, the Pyrotic had been kept in his stateroom. This was the newest of the Earth SpaceCom ships, yet he had seen none of it. Just this tiny stateroom, and the constant company of the ensign.

The SpaceCom man's watery blue eyes swept between the pallid man and the teleport-proof safe set in the cabin's bulkhead.

"Any idea why they're sending us so deep into Delgart territory?" the ensign fished. "It's pretty tight lines up this far. Must be something big. Any idea?"

Gunnederson's eyes came up from their focus on his boot-tops, and stared at the spaceman. He idly flipped the harmonica he had requested before blast-off and had used to pass away the long hours in inverspace. "No idea. How long have we been at war with the Delgarts?"

"Don't you even know who your planet's at war with?"

"I've been rural for many years. And aren't we *always* at war with someone?"

The ensign looked startled. "Not unless it's to protect the

peace of the galaxies. Earth is a peace-loving—"

Gunnderson cut him off. "Yes. I know. But how long have we been at war with the Delgarts? I thought they were our allies under some treaty or other?"

The spaceman's face contorted in a picture of conditioned hatred. "We've been after the bastards since they jumped one of our mining planets outside their cluster." He twisted his lips in open loathing. "We'll clean the bastards out soon enough! Teach *them* to jump peaceful Earthmen."

Gunnderson wished he could shut out the words. He had heard the same story all the way to A Centauri IX and back. Someone had always jumped someone else; someone was always at war with someone else; there were always bastards to be cleaned out . . .

The invership whipped past the myriad colors of inverspace, hurtling through that not-space toward the alien cluster. Gunnderson sat in the teleportproof stateroom, triple-loktited, and waited. He had no idea what they wanted of him, why they had tested him, why they had sent him through the pre-flight checkups, why he was here. But he knew one thing: whatever it was, there was to be no peace for *him* . . . ever.

He silently cursed the strange mental power he had. The power to make the molecules of *anything* speed up tremendously, making them grind against one another, causing combustion. A strange, channeled teleport faculty that was useless for anything but the creation of fire. He damned it soulfully, wishing he had been born deaf, mute, blind, incapable of any contact with the world.

From the moment of his life when he had become aware of his strange power, he had been haunted. No control, no identification, no communication. Cut off. Tagged as an oddie. Not even the pleasures of being an acknowledged psioid like the Mindees, the invaluable Drivers, the Blasters, or the Malla-ports who could move the atoms of flesh to their design. He was an oddie: a non-directive psioid. Tagged deadly and uncontrollable. He could set the fires, but he could not control them. The molecules were too tiny, too quickly imitative for him to stop the activity once it was started. It had to stop of its own volition—and usually it was too long in stopping.

Once he had thought himself normal, once he had thought of leading an ordinary life—of perhaps becoming a musician. But that idea had died aflaming, as

all other normal ideas had followed it.

First the ostracism, then the hunting, then the arrests and the prison terms, one after another. Now something new—something he could not understand. What did they want with him? It was obviously in connection with the mighty battle being fought between Earth and the Delgarts, but of what use could his unreliable powers be?

Why was he in this most marvelous of the new SpaceCom ships, heading toward the central sun of the enemy cluster? And why should he help Earth in any case?

At that moment the locks popped, the safe broke open, and the clanging of the alarms was heard to the bowels of the invership.

The ensign stopped him as he rose and started toward the safe. The ensign thumbed a button on his wrist-console.

"Hold it, Mr. Gunnederson. I wasn't told what was in there, but I was told to keep you away from it until the other two got here."

Gunnederson slumped back hopelessly on the acceleration-bunk. He dropped the harmonica to the metal floor and lowered his head into his hands. "What other two?"

"I don't know, sir. I wasn't told."

THE OTHER TWO were psi-oids, naturally.

When the Mindee and the Blaster arrived, they motioned the ensign to remove the contents of the safe. He walked over nervously, took out the tiny recorder and the single speak-tip.

"Play it, ensign," the Mindee directed.

The spaceman thumbed the speak-tip into the hole, and the grating of the blank space at the beginning of the record filled the room.

"You can leave now, ensign," the Mindee said.

After the SpaceCom officer had securely loktited the door, the voice began. Gunnederson recognized it immediately as that of Terrence, head of SpaceCom. The man who had questioned him tirelessly at the Bureau building in Buenos Aires. Terrence; hero of another war, the Earth-Kyben war, now head of SpaceCom. The words were brittle, almost without inflection, yet they carried a sense of utmost importance:

"Gunnederson," it began, "we have, as you already know, a job for you. By this time the ship will have reached the central-point of your trip through inverspace.

"You will arrive in two days Earthtime at a slip-out point approximately five million miles

from Omalo, the enemy sun. You will be far behind enemy lines, but we are certain you will be able to accomplish your mission safely. That is why you have been given this new ship. It can withstand anything the enemy can throw.

"We want you to get back after your job is done. You are the most important man in our war effort, Gunnederson, and this is only your first mission.

"We want you to turn the sun Omalo into a supernova."

GUNNDERSON, for perhaps the second time in thirty-eight years of bleak, gray life, was staggered. The very concept made his stomach churn. Turn another people's sun into a flaming, gaseous bomb of incalculable power, spreading death into space, charring into nothing the planets of the system? Annihilate in one move an entire culture?

What did they think he was capable of?

Could he direct his mind to such a task?

Could he do it?

Should he do it?

His mind boggled at the possibility. He had never really considered himself as having many ideals. He had set fires in warehouses to get the owners their liability insurance; he had flamed other hobos who had

tried to rob him; he had used the unpredictable power of his mind for many things, but this—

This was the murder of a solar system!

He wasn't in any way sure he *could* turn a sun supernova. What was there to lead them to think he might be able to do it? Burning a forest and burning a giant red sun were two things fantastically far apart. It was something out of a nightmare. But even if he *could* . . .

"In case you find the task unpleasant, Mr. Gunnederson," the ice-chip voice of the SpaceCom head continued, "we have included in this ship's complement a Mindee and a Blaster.

"Their sole job is to watch and protect you, Mr. Gunnederson. To make certain you are kept in the proper, *patriotic* state of mind. They have been instructed to read you from this moment on, and should you not be willing to carry out your assignment . . . well, I'm certain you are familiar with a Blaster's capabilities."

Gunnederson stared at the blank-faced telepath sitting across from him on the other bunk. The man was obviously listening to every thought in Gunnederson's head. A strange, nervous expression was on the Mindee's face. His gaze turned to the Blaster who accompanied

him, then back to Gunnederson.

The Pyrotic swiveled a glance at the Blaster, then swiveled away as quickly.

Blasters were men meant to do one job, one job only; a Blaster became the type of man he *had* to be, to be successful doing that job. They all looked the same, and now Gunnederson found the look almost terrifying. He had not thought he could *be* terrified, any more.

"That is your assignment, Gunnederson, and if you have any hesitation, remember our enemy is *not* human. They may look like you, but mentally they are extra-terrestrials as unlike you as you are unlike a slug. And remember there's a war on. You will be saving the lives of many Earthmen by performing this task.

"This is your chance to become respected, Gunnederson.

"A hero, respected, and for the first time," he paused, as though not wishing to say what was next, "for the first time—worthy of your world."

The rasp-rasp-rasp of the silent record filled the stateroom. Gunnederson said nothing. He could hear the phrase whirling, whirling in his head: *There's a war on, There's a war on, THERE'S A WAR ON!* He stood up and slowly walked to the door.

"Sorry, Mr. Gunnederson,"

the Mindee said emphatically, "we can't allow you to leave this room."

He sat down and lifted the battered mouth organ from where it had fallen. He fingered it for a while, then put it to his lips. He blew, but made no sound.

And he didn't leave.

CHAPTER III

THEY THOUGHT he was asleep. The Mindee—a cadaverously thin man with hair grayed at the temples and slicked back in strips on top, with a gasping speech and a nervous movement of hand to ear—spoke to the Blaster.

"He doesn't seem to be thinking, John!"

The Blaster's smooth, hard features moved vaguely, and a quirking frown split his ink-line mouth. "Can he do it?"

The Mindee rose, ran a hand quickly through the straight, slicked hair.

"Can he do it? No, he shouldn't be *able* to do it, but he's doing it! I can't figure it out . . . it's eerie. Either I've lost it, or he's got something new."

"Trauma-barrier?"

"That's what they told me before I left, that he seemed to be blocked off. But they thought it was only temporary, and that

once he was away from the Bureau buildings he'd clear up.

"But he *hasn't* cleared up."

The Blaster looked concerned.

"Maybe it's you."

"I didn't get a Master's rating for nothing, John, and I tell you there isn't a trauma-barrier I can't at least get *something* through. If only a snatch of gabble. But here there's nothing—nothing!"

"Maybe it's you," the Blaster repeated, still concerned.

"Damn it! It's *not* me! I can read you, can't I—your right foot hurts from new boots, you wish you could have the bunk to lie down on, you . . . Oh, hell, I can read *you*, and I can read the Captain up front, and I can read the pitmen in the hold, but I *can't* read *him*!"

"It's like hitting a sheet of glass in his head. There should be a reflection if not penetration, but he seems to be opaqued. I didn't want to say anything when he was awake, of course."

"Do you think I should twit him a little—wake him up and warn him we're on to his game?"

The Mindee raised a hand to stop the very thought of the Blaster. "Great Gods, no!" He gestured wildly, "This Gunnederson's invaluable. If they found out we'd done anything unauthorized to him, we'd both be tanked."

Gunnederson lay on his acceleration-bunk, feigning sleep, listening to them. It was a new discovery to him, what they were saying. He had sometimes suspected that the pyrotic faculty of his mind was not the only way he differed from the norm—perhaps not the only way. And if it was a side-effect, there ought to be others. He knew *he* could not read minds; was this impenetrability by Mindees another factor?

Perhaps the Blaster was powerless against him, too.

It would never clear away his problem—that was something he could do only in his own mind—but it might make his position and final decision safer.

There was only one way to find out. He knew the Blaster could not actually harm him severely, by SpaceCom's orders; but he wouldn't hesitate to blast off one of the Pyrotic's arms—cauterizing it as it disappeared—to warn him, if the situation seemed desperate enough.

The Blaster had seemed to Gunnederson a singularly overzealous man, in any case. It was a terrible risk, but he had to know.

There was only one way to find out, and he took it, finding a startling new vitality in himself for the first time in over thirty years.

He snapped his legs off the



bunk, and lunged across the stateroom, shouldering aside the Mindee and straight-arming the Blaster in the mouth. The Blaster, surprised by the rapid and completely unexpected movement, had a reflex thought, and one entire bulkhead was washed by bolts of power. They crackled, and the plasteel buckled. His direction had been upset, but Gunnederson knew the instant he regained his mental balance, the power would be directed at him.

Gunnederson was at the stateroom door, palming the loktite open—having watched the manner used by the Blaster when he had left on several occasions—and putting one foot into the companionway.

Then the Blaster struck. His fury rose, and he lost his sense of duty. This man had struck him—an accepted psioid, not an oddie! The black of his eyes deepened, and his face strained. His cheekbones rose in a stric-

ture of a grin, and the *force* materialized.

It was all around Gunnederson.

He could feel the heat . . . see his clothes sparking and disappearing . . . feel his hair charring at the tips . . . feel the strain of psi power in the air.

But there was no effect on *him*.

He was safe—safe from the power of the Blaster.

Then he knew he didn't have to run, and he turned back to the cabin.

The two psioids were staring at him in open terror.

It was always night in inverspace.

The ship ploughed constantly through a swamp of black, with metal inside, and metal outside, and the cold, unchanging devil-dark beyond the metal. Men hated inverspace—they sometimes took the years-long jour-



ney through normal space, to avoid the chilling mystery of inverspace. For one moment the total black would surround the ship, and the next they would be sifting through a field of changing, flickering crazy-quilt colors. Then ebony again, then light, then dots, then shafts, then the dark once more. It was ever-changing, like a madman's dream. But not interestingly changing, so one would wish to watch, as one might watch a kaleidoscope. This was strange, and unnatural, something beyond the powers of the mind, or the abilities of the eye to comprehend. Ports were allowed only in the officer's country, and those had solid lead shields that would slam down and dog closed at the slap of a button. Nothing else could be done, for men were men, and space was his eternal enemy. But no man willingly stared back at the deep of inverspace.

In the officer's country, Alf Gundersen reached with his sight and his mind into the coal-soot that now lay beyond the ship. Since he had proved his invulnerability over the Blaster, he had been given the run of the ship. Where could he go? Nowhere that he could not be found. Guards watched the egress ports at all times, so he was still, in effect, a prisoner on the invership.

He stared from the giant quartz window, all shields open, all the darkness flowing in. The cabin was dark, but not half so dark as that darkness that was everywhere.

That darkness deeper than the darkness.

What was he? Was he man or was he machine, to be told he must turn a sun nova? What of the people on that sun's planets? What of the women and the children, alien or not? What of the people who hated war, and the people who served because they had been told to serve, and the people who wanted to be left alone? What of the men who went into the fields, while their fellow troops dutifully sharpened their war knives, and cried? Cried because they were afraid, and they were tired, and they wanted home without death. What of those men?

Was this war one of salvation or liberation or duty as they parroted the phrases of patriotism? Or was this still another of the unending wars for domination, larger holdings, richer worlds? Was this another vast joke of the Universe, where men were sent to their deaths so one type of government, no better than another, could rule? He didn't know. He wasn't sure. He was afraid. He had a power beyond all powers in his hands,

and he suddenly found himself not a tramp and a waste, but a man who might demolish a solar system at his own will.

Not even sure he *could* do it, he considered the possibility, and it terrified him, making his legs turn to rubber, his blood to liquid oxygen. He was suddenly quite lost, and immersed in a deeper darkness than he had ever known. With no way out.

He spoke to himself, letting his words sound foolish to himself, but sounding them just the same, knowing he had avoided sounding them for much too long:

"Can I do it?"

"Should I? I've waited so long, so long, to find a place, and now they tell me I've found a place. Is this my final place? Is this what I've lived and searched for? I can be a valuable war weapon. I can be the man the others turn to when they want a job done. But what sort of job?"

"Can I do it? Is it more important to me to find peace—even a peace such as this—and to destroy, than to go on with the unrest?"

Alf Gunnederson stared at the night, at the faint tinges of color beginning to form at the edges of his vision, and his mind washed itself in the water of thought. He had discovered

much about himself in the past few days. He had discovered many talents, many ideals he had never suspected in himself.

He had discovered he had character, and that he was not a hopeless, oddie hulk, doomed to die wasted. He found he had a future.

If he could make the proper decision.

But what *was* the proper decision?

"OMALO! Omalo snap-out!"

The cry roared through the companionways, bounced down the halls and against the metal hull of the invership, sprayed from the speakers, and deafened the men asleep beside their squawk-boxes.

The ship ploughed through a maze of colors whose names were unknown, skiiiiittered in a nameless direction, and popped out, shuddering. There it was. The sun of Delgart. Omalo. Big. And golden. With planets set about it like boulders on the edge of the sea. The sea that was space, and from which this ship had come. With death in its hold, and death in its tubes, and death, nothing but death, in its purpose.

The Blaster and the Mindee escorted Alf Gunnederson to the bridge. They stood back and let him walk to the huge quartz portal. The portal before which

the pyrotic had stood so long, so many hours, gazing so deep into inverspace. They left him there, and stood back, because they knew he was safe from them. No matter how hard they held his arms, no matter how fiercely they pounded thoughts at him, he was safe. He was something new. Not just a Pyrotic, not just a mind-blocked psioid, not just a Blaster-safe, he was something totally new.

Not a composite, for there had been many of those, with imperfect powers of several psi types. But something new, and incomprehensible to his guards. Psioid-plus—with a plus that might mean anything.

Gunnerson moved forward slowly, his deep shadow squirming out before him, sliding up the console, across the portal sill, and across the quartz itself. Himself superimposed across the immensity of space.

The man who was Gunnerson stared into the night that lay without, and at the sun that burned steadily and high in that night. A greater fire raged within him than on that sun.

His was a power he could not even begin to estimate, and if he let it be used in this way, this once, it could be turned to this purpose over and over and over again.

Was there any salvation for him?

"You're supposed to flame that sun, Gunnerson," the slick-haired Mindee said, trying to assume an authoritative tone, a tone of command, but failing miserably. He knew he was powerless before this man. They could shoot him, of course, but what would that accomplish?

"What are you going to do, Gunnerson? What do you have in mind?" the Blaster chimed in. "SpaceCom wants Omalo fired. Are you going to do it, or do we have to report you as a traitor?"

"You know what they'll do to you back on Earth, Gunnerson. You know, don't you?"

Alf Gunnerson let the light of Omalo wash his sunken face with red haze. His eyes seemed to deepen in intensity. His hands on the console ledge stiffened and the knuckles turned white. He had seen the possibilities, and he had decided. They would never understand that he had chosen the harder way. He turned slowly.

"Where is the lifescoot located?"

They stared at him, and he repeated his question. They refused to answer, and he shouldered past them, stepped into the droptube to take him below decks. The Mindee spun on him, his face raging.

"You're a coward and a traitor, fireboy! You're a lousy

no-psi freak and we'll get you! You can take the lifeboat, but someday we'll find you! No matter where you go out there, we're going to find you!"

He spat then, and the Blaster strained and strained and strained, but the power of his mind had no effect on Gunnerson.

The Pyrotic let the dropshaft lower him, and he found the lifescoot some time later. He took nothing with him but the battered harmonica, and the red flush of Omalo on his face.

When they felt the *pop!* of the lifescoot being snapped into space, and they saw the dark gray dot of it moving rapidly away, flicking quickly off into inverspace, the Blaster and the Mindee slumped into relaxers, stared at each other.

"We'll have to finish the war without him."

The Blaster nodded. "He could have won it for us in one minute. And now he's gone."

"Do you think he could have done it?"

The Blaster shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"He's gone," the Mindee repeated bitterly. "*He's gone?* Coward! Traitor! Someday . . . someday . . ."

"Where can he go?"

"He's a wanderer at heart. Space is deep, he can go anywhere."

"Did you mean that, about finding him someday?"

The Mindee nodded rapidly. "When they find out, back on Earth, what he did today, they'll start hunting him through all of space. He'll never have another moment's peace. They *have* to find him—he's the perfect weapon. And he can't run forever. They'll find him."

"A strange man."

"A man with a power he can't hide, John. We know he can't control it, so how can he hide it? Sooner or later he will give himself away. He *can't* hide himself cleverly enough to stay hidden forever."

"Odd that he would turn himself into a fugitive. He could have had peace of mind for the rest of his life. Instead, he's got this . . ."

The Mindee stared at the closed portal shields. His tones were bitter and frustrated. "We'll find him someday."

The ship shuddered, reversed drives, and slipped back into inverspace.

CHAPTER IV

MUCH SKY winked back at him.

He sat on the bluff, wind tousling his gray hair, flapping softly at the dirty shirt-tail hanging from his pants top.

The Minstrel sat on the bluff

watching the land fall slopingly away under him, down to the shining hide of the sprawling dragon that was a city, lying in the cup of the hills. The dragon that crouched where lush grass had once grown.

On this quiet world, far from a red sun that shone high and steady, the Minstrel sat and pondered the many kinds of peace. And the kind that is not peace, can *never* be peace.

His eyes turned once more to the sage and eternal advice of the blackness above. No one saw him wink back at the silent stars.

With a sigh he slung the battered theremin over his frayed shoulders. It was a portable machine, with both rods bent and its power-pack patched and soldered. His body almost at once assumed the half-slouched, round-shouldered walk of the wanderer. He ambled down the hill toward the rocket field.

They called it the rocket field, out here on the Edge, but they didn't use rockets any longer. Now they rode to space on strange tubes that whistled and sparkled behind the ship till it flicked off into some crazy-quilt not-space, and was gone forever.

Tarmac clicked under the heels of his boots. Bright, shining boots, kept meticulously clean by polishing over polish-

ing till they reflected back the corona of the field kliegs and, more faintly, the gleam of the stars. The Minstrel kept them cleaned and polished, a clashing note matched against his generally unkempt appearance.

He was tall, towering over almost everyone he had ever met in his homeless wanderings. His body was a lean and supple thing, like a high-tension wire, with the merest suggestion of contained power and quickness. He moved with an easy gait, accentuating his long legs and gangling arms, making his well-proportioned head seem a bubble precariously balanced on a neck too long and thin to support it.

He kept time to the click of the polished boots with a soft half-hum, half-whistle. The song was a dead song, long forgotten.

He came from beyond the mountains. No one knew where. No one cared where.

But they listened when he came. They listened almost reverently, with a desperation born of men who know they are severed from their home worlds, who know they will go out and out and seldom come back. He sang of space, and he sang of land, and he sang of the peace that is left for Man—all men, no matter how many arms they had, or what their skin was col-

ored—when he has expended the last little bit of Eternity to which he is entitled.

His voice had the sadness of death in it—the sadness of death before life has finished its work. But it also had the joy of metal under quick fingers, the strength of turned nickel-steel, and the whip of heart and soul working in loneliness. They listened when his song came with the night wind, probing, crying through the darkness of a thousand worlds and in a thousand winds.

The pitmen stopped their work as he came, silent but for the hum of his song and the beat of his boots on the blacktop. They watched as he came across the field.

He had been wandering the star-paths for many years now. He had appeared, and that was all; he was. They knew him as certainly as they knew themselves. They turned and he was like a pillar, set dark against the light and shadow of the field. He paced slowly, and they stopped the hoses feeding the radioactive food to the ships, and the torches with which they flayed the metal skins; and they listened.

The Minstrel knew they were listening, and he unslung his instrument, settling the narrow box with its tone-rods around his neck by its thong. His fin-

gers cajoled and pried and extracted the song of a soul, cast into the pit of the void, left to die, crying in torment not so much at death, but at the terror of being alone when the last call came.

And the workmen cried.

They felt no shame as the tears coursed through the dirt on their faces and mixed with the sweat-shine of their toil. They stood, silent and dreaming, as he came toward them.

And before they even knew it was ended, and for seconds after the wail had fled back across the field into the mountains, they listened to the last notes of his lament.

Hands wiped clumsily across faces, leaving more dirt than before, and backs turned slowly as men resumed work. It seemed they could not face him, the nearer he came; as though he was too deep-seeing, too perceptive for them to be at ease close by. It was a mixture of respect and awe.

The Minstrel stood, waiting.

"HEY! YOU!"

The Minstrel did not move. There was a pad of soft-soled feet behind him. A spaceman—tanned, supple, almost as tall as the ballad-singer and reminding him of another spaceman, a blond-haired boy he had known long ago—came up beside him.

"What can I do for ya, Minstrel?" asked the spaceman, tones of the accent of a long distant Earth rich in his voice.

"What do they call this world?" the Minstrel asked. His voice was quiet, like a needle being drawn through velvet.

"The natives call it Audi, and the charts call it Rexa Majoris XXIX, Minstrel. Why?"

"It's time to move on."

The spaceman grinned hugely, lines of amusement crinkling out around his watery brown eyes. "Need a lift?"

The Minstrel nodded.

The spaceman's face softened, the lines of squinting into the reaches of an eternal night broke and he extended his hand: "My name's Quantry; top dog on the *Spirit of Lucy Marlowe*. If you don't mind working your way singing for the passengers, we'd be pleased to have you on board."

The tall man smiled, a quick radiance across the shadows of his face. "That isn't work."

"Then done!" exclaimed the spaceman. "C'mon, I'll fix you a bunk in steerage."

They walked between the wiper gangs and the pitmen. They threaded their way between the glare of fluoro-torches and the sputtering blast of robot welding instruments. The man named Quantry indicated the opening in the smooth side of

the ship and the Minstrel clambered inside.

Quantry fixed the berth just behind the reactor feeder-bins, walling off a compartment with an electric blanket draped over a loading track rail. The Minstrel lay on his bunk—a repair bench—with a pillow under his head. He lay thinking.

The moments fled silently and his mind, deep in thought, hardly realized the ports were being dogged home, the radio-active additives being sluiced through their tubes to the converter-cells, the lift tubes being extruded. His mind did not leave its thoughts as the tubes warmed, turning the pit to green glass beneath the ship's bulk. Tubes that would carry the ship to a height where the Driver would be wakened from his sleep—or *her* sleep, as was more often the case with that particular breed of psioid—to snap the ship into inverspace.

As the ship came unstuck from solid ground and hurled itself outward on its whistling sparks, the Minstrel lay back, letting the reassuring hand of acceleration press him into deeper reverie. Thoughts spun, of the past, of the further past, and of all the pasts he had known.

Then the converter-cells cut off, the ship shuddered, and he knew they were inverspace. The

Minstrel sat up, his eyes far away. His thoughts were deep inside the cloud-cover of a world billions of light-years away, hundreds of years lost to him. A world he would never see again.

There was a time for running, and a time for resting, but even in the running there could be resting. He smiled to himself so faintly it was not a smile.

Down in the reactor rooms, they heard his song. They heard the build of it, matching, sustaining, ringing in harmony with the inverspace drive. They grinned at each other with a softness their faces did not seem equipped to wear.

"It's gonna be a good trip,"

said one to another, smiling.

In the officer's country, Quantry looked up at the tight-slammed shields blocking off the patchwork insanity of not-space, and *he* smiled. It *was* going to be a good trip.

In the salons, the passengers listened to the odd strains of lonely music coming up from below, and even they were forced to admit, though they had no way of explaining how they knew, that this was indeed going to be a good trip.

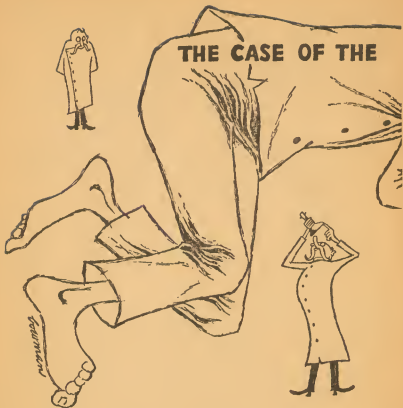
And in steerage, his fingers wandering across the keyboard of the battered theremin, no one noticed that the man they called the Minstrel had lit his cigarette without a match.

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TALES FOR TOMORROW

We have another special feature coming up next issue—one that is the result of a genuinely exciting experiment in science-fiction writing. What happens when three top-notch, but widely differing, writers are challenged to produce excellent, and related, stories—each under the most difficult conditions possible, and each without knowing what the other has written? We're sure the results will surprise and impress you. The writers involved: Isaac Asimov, Randall Garrett, and Harlan Ellison. The titles of their stories: "Blank!", "Blank?"—and "Blank . . ."

In addition, there will be two really superb novelets by Damon Knight and Robert F. Young, each of whom manages to throw a brilliant new light on a familiar science-fictional theme, and short stories by Robert Silverberg, H. B. Fyfe, and others. For surprises and superior s-f, get INFINITY!



Sigmund's problem was simply stated:

no sleep, no wife; no wife, no money!

But how can a man control his snores?



by ARTHUR C. CLARKE

IT WAS ONE of those half-hearted discussions that is liable to get going in the "White Hart" when no one can think of anything better to argue about. We were trying to recall the most extraordinary names we'd ever encountered, and I had just contributed "Obediah Polkinghorn" when—inevitably

—Harry Purvis got into the act.

"It's easy enough to dig up odd names," he said, reprimanding us for our levity, "but have you ever stopped to consider a much more fundamental point—the *effects* of those names on their owners? Sometimes, you know, such a thing can warp a man's entire life. That is what

Illustrated by BOWMAN

happened to young Sigmund Snoring."

"Oh, no!" groaned Charles Willis, one of Harry's most implacable critics. "I don't believe it!"

"Do you imagine," said Harry indignantly, "that I'd *invent* a name like that? As a matter of fact, Sigmund's family name was something Central European that began with *Sch* and went on for quite a while in that vein. 'Snoring' was just an anglicised *précis* of it. However, all this is by the way; I wish people wouldn't make me waste time on such details."

Charlie, who is the most promising author I know (he has been promising for more than twenty-five years) started to make vaguely protesting noises, but someone publicspiritedly diverted him with a glass of beer.

"Sigmund," continued Harry, "bore his burden bravely enough until he reached manhood. There is little doubt, however, that his name preyed upon his mind, and finally produced what you might call a psychosomatic result. If Sigmund had been born of any other parents, I am sure that he would never have become a sterterous and incessant snorer in fact as well as—almost—in name.

"Well, there are worse tragedies in life. Sigmund's family

had a fair amount of money, and a sound-proofed bedroom protected the remainder of the household from sleepless nights. As is usually the case, Sigmund was quite unaware of his own nocturnal symphonies, and could never really understand what all the fuss was about.

"It was not until he got married that he was compelled to take his affliction—if you can call it that, for it only inflicted itself on other people—as seriously as it deserved. There is nothing unusual in a young bride returning from her honeymoon in a somewhat distracted condition, but poor Rachel Snoring had been through a uniquely shattering experience. She was red-eyed with lack of sleep, and any attempt to get sympathy from her friends only made them dissolve into peals of laughter. So it was not surprising that she gave Sigmund an ultimatum: unless he did something about his snoring, the marriage was off.

"Now this was a very serious matter both for Sigmund and his family. They were fairly well-to-do, but by no means rich—unlike Grand-uncle Reuben, who had died the year before leaving a rather complicated will. He had taken quite a fancy to Sigmund, and had left a considerable sum of money in trust for him, which the lad would re-

INFINITY specializes in pleasant surprises—like this previously un-announced story by that all-time favorite, Arthur C. Clarke, in an unexpected and delightfully humorous vein. Up to now, Clarke's "Tales of the White Hart" have appeared almost exclusively in the slick men's magazines, so this is a real coup for us—and a pure joy for you!

ceive when he was thirty. Unfortunately, Grand-uncle Reuben was very old-fashioned and strait-laced, and did not altogether trust the modern generation. One of the conditions of the bequest was that Sigmund should not be divorced or separated before the designated date. If he was, the money would go to found an orphanage in Tel Aviv.

"It was a difficult situation, and there is no way of guessing how it would have resolved itself had not someone suggested that Sigmund ought to go and see Uncle Hymie. Sigmund was not at all keen on this, but desperate predicaments demanded desperate remedies; so he went.

"UNCLE HYMIE, I should explain, was a very distinguished professor of physiology, and a Fellow of the Royal Society with a whole string of papers to his credit. He was also, at the moment, somewhat short of money, owing to a quarrel with the trustees of his college, and had been compelled to stop work on some of his pet research proj-

ects. To add to his annoyance, the Physics Department had just been given half a million pounds for a new synchrotron, so he was in no pleasant mood when his unhappy nephew called.

"Trying to ignore the all-pervading smell of disinfectant and livestock, Sigmund followed the lab steward along rows of incomprehensible equipment, and past cages of mice and guinea-pigs, frequently averting his eyes from the revolting colored diagrams which occupied so much wall space. He found his uncle sitting at a bench, drinking tea from a beaker and absent-mindedly nibbling sandwiches.

"'Help yourself,' he said ungraciously. 'Roast hamster—delicious. One of the litter we used for some cancer tests. What's the trouble?'

"Pleading lack of appetite, Sigmund told his distinguished uncle his tale of woe. The professor listened without much sympathy.

"'Don't know what you got married for,' he said at last. 'Complete waste of time.' Uncle

Hymie was known to possess strong views on this subject, having had five children but no wives. 'Still, we might be able to do something. How much money have you got?'

"'Why?' asked Sigmund, somewhat taken aback. The professor waved his arms around the lab.

"'Costs a lot to run all this,' he said.

"'But I thought the university—'

"'Oh yes—but any special work will have to be under the counter, as it were. I can't use college funds for it.'

"'Well, how much will you need to get started?'

"Uncle Hymie mentioned a sum which was rather smaller than Sigmund had feared, but his satisfaction did not last for long. The scientist, it soon transpired, was fully acquainted with Grand-uncle Reuben's will; Sigmund would have to draw up a contract promising him a share of the loot when, in five years' time, the money became his. The present payment was merely an advance.

"'Even so, I don't promise anything, but I'll see what can be done,' said Uncle Hymie, examining the check carefully. 'Come and see me in a month.'

"That was all that Sigmund could get out of him, for the professor was then distracted by

a highly decorative research student in a sweater which appeared to have been sprayed on her. They started discussing the domestic affairs of the lab's rats in such terms that Sigmund, who was easily embarrassed, had to beat a hasty retreat.

"Now, I don't really think that Uncle Hymie would have taken Sigmund's money unless he was fairly sure he could deliver the goods. He must, therefore, have been quite near the completion of his work when the university had slashed his funds; certainly he could never have produced, in a mere four weeks, whatever complex mixture of chemicals it was that he injected into his hopeful nephew's arm a month after receiving the cash. The experiment was carried out at the professor's own home, late one evening; Sigmund was not too surprised to find the lady research student in attendance.

"'What will this stuff *do*?' he asked.

"'It will stop you snoring—I hope,' answered Uncle Hymie. 'Now, here's a nice comfortable seat, and a pile of magazines to read. Irma and I will take turns keeping an eye on you in case there are any side-reactions.'

"'Side-reactions?' said Sigmund anxiously, rubbing his arm.



"Don't worry—just take it easy. In a couple of hours we'll know if it works."

"So Sigmund waited for sleep to come, while the two scientists fussed around him (not to mention around each other) taking readings of blood-pressure, pulse, temperature and generally making Sigmund feel like a chronic invalid. When midnight arrived, he was not at all sleepy, but the professor and his assistant were almost dead on their feet. Sigmund realized that they had been working long hours on his behalf, and felt a gratitude which was quite touching during the short period while it lasted.

"Midnight came and passed. Irma folded up and the professor laid her, none too gently, on the couch. "You're quite sure you don't feel tired yet?" he yawned at Sigmund.

"Not a bit. It's very odd; I'm usually fast asleep by this time."

"You feel perfectly all right?"

"Never felt better."

"There was another vast yawn from the professor. He muttered something like, 'Should have taken some of it myself,' and subsided into an armchair.

"Give us a shout," he said sleepily, 'if you feel anything unusual. No point in our staying up any longer.' A moment later Sigmund, still somewhat mysti-

fied, was the only conscious person in the room.

"He read a dozen copies of *Punch*, stamped 'Not to be Removed from the Common Room,' until it was two a.m. He polished off all the *Saturday Evening Posts* by four. A small bundle of *New Yorkers* kept him busy until five, when he had a stroke of luck. An exclusive diet of caviare soon grows monotonous, and Sigmund was delighted to discover a limp and much-thumbed volume entitled *The Blonde Was Willing*. This engaged his full attention until dawn, when Uncle Hymie gave a convulsive start, shot out of his chair, woke Irma with a well-directed slap, and then turned his full attention towards Sigmund.

"Well, my boy," he said, with a hearty cheerfulness that at once alerted Sigmund's suspicions, 'I've done what you wanted. You passed the night without snoring, didn't you?'

"Sigmund put down the *Will-ing Blonde*, who was now in a situation where her co-operation or lack of it would make no difference at all.

"I didn't snore," he admitted. 'But I didn't sleep either.'

"You still feel perfectly wide awake?"

"Yes—I don't understand it at all."

"Uncle Hymie and Irma ex-

changed triumphant glances. 'You've made history, Sigmund,' said the professor. 'You're the first man to be able to do without sleep.' And so the news was broken to the astonished and not yet indignant guinea-pig.

"I KNOW," continued Harry Purvis, not altogether accurately, "that many of you would like the scientific details of Uncle Hymie's discovery. But I don't know them, and if I did they would be too technical to give here. I'll merely point out, since I see some expressions which a less trusting man might describe as skeptical, that there is nothing really startling about such a development. Sleep, after all, is a highly variable factor. Look at Edison, who managed on two or three hours a day right up to the end of his life. It's true that men can't go without sleep indefinitely—but some animals can, so it clearly isn't a fundamental part of metabolism."

"*What* animals can go without sleep?" asked somebody, not so much in disbelief as out of pure curiosity.

"Well—er—of course!—the fish that live out in deep water beyond the continental shelf. If they ever fell asleep, they'd be snapped up by other fish, or they'd lose their trim and sink to the bottom. So they've got to keep awake all their lives."

(I am still, by the way, trying to find if this statement of Harry's is true. I've never caught him out yet on a scientific fact, though once or twice I've had to give him the benefit of the doubt. But back to Uncle Hymie.)

"It took some time," continued Harry, "for Sigmund to realize what an astonishing thing had been done to him. An enthusiastic commentary from his uncle, enlarging upon all the glorious possibilities that had been opened up for him now that he had been freed from the tyranny of sleep, made it difficult to concentrate on the problem. But presently he was able to raise the question that had been worrying him. 'How long will this last?' he inquired.

"The professor and Irma looked at each other. Then Uncle Hymie coughed a little nervously and replied: 'We're not quite sure yet. That's one thing we've got to find out. It's perfectly possible that the effect will be permanent.'

"You mean that I'll never be able to sleep again?"

"Not 'never be able to.' Never *want* to. However, I could probably work out some way of reversing the process if you're really anxious. Cost a lot of money, though."

"Sigmund left hastily, promising to keep in touch and to

report his progress every day. His brain was still in a turmoil, but first he had to find his wife and to convince her that he would never snore again.

"She was quite willing to believe him, and they had a touching reunion. But in the small hours of next morning it got very dull lying there with no one to talk to, and presently Sigmund tiptoed away from his sleeping wife. For the first time, the full reality of his position was beginning to dawn upon him; what on earth was he going to do with the extra eight hours a day that had descended upon him as an unwanted gift?

"You might think that Sigmund had a wonderful—indeed an unprecedented—opportunity for leading a fuller life by acquiring that culture and knowledge which we all feel we'd like if only we had the time to do something about it. He could read every one of the great classics that are just names to most people; he could study art, music or philosophy, and fill his mind with all the finest treasures of the human intellect. In fact, a good many of you are probably envying him right now.

"Well, it didn't work out that way. The fact of the matter is that even the highest grade mind needs some relaxation, and cannot devote itself to serious pursuits indefinitely. It was true that



Sigmund had no further need of sleep, but he needed entertainment to occupy him during the long, empty hours of darkness.

"Civilization, he soon discovered, was not designed to fit the requirements of a man who couldn't sleep. He might have been better off in Paris or New York, but in London practically everything closed down at eleven p.m., only a few coffee-bars were still open at midnight, and by one a.m.—well, the less said about any establishments still operating, the better.

"At first, when the weather was good, he occupied his time going for long walks, but after

several encounters with inquisitive and skeptical policemen he gave this up. So he took to the car and drove all over London during the small hours, discovering all sorts of odd places he never knew existed. He soon had a nodding acquaintance with many night-watchmen, Covent Garden porters, and milkmen, as well as Fleet Street journalists and printers who had to work while the rest of the world slept. But as Sigmund was not the sort of person who took a great interest in his fellow human beings, this amusement soon palled and he was thrown back upon his own limited resources.

"His wife, as might be expected, was not at all happy about his nocturnal wanderings. He had told her the whole story, and though she had found it hard to believe she was forced to accept the evidence of her own eyes. But having done so, it seemed that she would prefer a husband who snored and stayed at home to one who tiptoed away around midnight and was not always back by breakfast.

"This upset Sigmund greatly. He had spent or promised a good deal of money (as he kept reminding Rachel) and taken a considerable personal risk to cure himself of his malaise. And was she grateful? No; she just wanted an itemized account of the time he spent when he

should have been sleeping but wasn't. It was most unfair and showed a lack of trust which he found very disheartening.

"Slowly the secret spread through a wider circle, though the Snorings (who were a very close-knit clan) managed to keep it inside the family. Uncle Lorenz, who was in the diamond business, suggested that Sigmund take up a second job as it seemed a pity to waste all that additional working time. He produced a list of one-man occupations, which could be carried on equally easily by day or by night, but Sigmund thanked him kindly and said he saw no reason why he should pay two lots of income tax.

"By the end of six weeks of twenty-four-hour days, Sigmund had had enough. He felt he couldn't read another book, go to another nightclub or listen to another gramophone record. His great gift, which many foolish men would have paid a fortune to possess, had become an intolerable burden. There was nothing to do but to go and see Uncle Hymie again.

"THE PROFESSOR had been expecting him, and there was no need to threaten legal proceedings, to appeal to the solidarity of the Snorings, or to make pointed remarks about breach of contract.

"'All right, all right,' grumbled the scientist. 'I don't believe in casting pearls before swine. I knew you'd want the antidote sooner or later, and because I'm a generous man it'll only cost you fifty guineas. But don't blame me if you snore worse than ever.'

"'I'll take that risk,' said Sigmund. As far as he and Rachel were concerned, it had come to separate rooms anyway by this time.

"He averted his gaze as the professor's assistant (not Irma this time, but an angular brunette) filled a terrifyingly large hypodermic with Uncle Hymie's latest brew. Before he had absorbed half of it, he had fallen asleep.

"For once, Uncle Hymie looked quite disconcerted. 'I didn't expect it to act *that* fast,' he said. 'Well, let's get him to bed—we can't have him lying around the lab.'

"By next morning, Sigmund was still fast asleep and showed no reactions to any stimuli. His breathing was imperceptible; he seemed to be in a trance rather than a slumber, and the professor was getting a little alarmed.

"His worry did not last for long, however. A few hours later an angry guinea-pig bit him on the finger, blood poisoning set in, and the editor of *Nature* was just able to get the obituary no-

tice into the current issue before it went to press.

"Sigmund slept through all this activity and was still blissfully unconscious when the family got back from the Golders Green Crematorium and assembled for a council of war. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*, but it was obvious that the late Professor Hymie had made another unfortunate mistake, and no one knew how to set about unraveling it.

"Cousin Meyer, who ran a furniture store in the Mile End Road, offered to take charge of Sigmund if he could put him on display in his shop window to demonstrate the luxury of the beds he stocked. However, it was felt that this would be too undignified, and the family vetoed the scheme.

"But it did give them ideas. By now they were getting a little fed up with Sigmund; this flying from one extreme to another was really too much. So why not take the easy way out and, as one wit expressed it, let sleeping Sigmunds lie?

"THERE was no point in calling in another expensive expert who might only make matters worse (though how they could be worse, no one could quite imagine). It cost nothing to feed Sigmund, he required only a modicum of medical attention,

and while he was sleeping there was 'certainly no danger of his breaking the terms of Grand-uncle Reuben's will. When this argument was rather tactfully put to Rachel, she quite saw the strength of it. The policy demanded required a certain amount of patience, but the

ultimate reward would be considerable.

"The more Rachel examined it, the more she liked the idea. The thought of being a wealthy near-widow appealed to her; it had such interesting and novel possibilities. And, to tell the truth, she had had quite enough



of Sigmund to last her for the five years until he came into his inheritance.

"In due course that time arrived and Sigmund became a semi-demi-millionaire. However, he still slept soundly—and in all those five years he had never snored once. He looked so peaceful lying there that it seemed a pity to wake him up, even if anyone knew exactly how to set about it. Rachel felt strongly that ill-advised tampering might have unfortunate consequences, and the family, after assuring itself that she could only get at the interest on Sigmund's fortune and not at the capital, was inclined to agree with her.

"And that was several years ago. When I last heard of him, Sigmund was still peacefully sleeping, while Rachel was having a perfectly wonderful

time on the Riviera. She is quite a shrewd woman, as you may have guessed, and I think she realizes how convenient it might be to have a youthful husband in cold storage for her old age.

"There are times, I must admit, when I think it's rather a pity that Uncle Hymie never had a chance to reveal his remarkable discoveries to the world. But Sigmund proved that our civilization isn't yet ripe for such changes, and I hope I'm not around when some other physiologist starts the whole thing all over again."

Harry looked at the clock. "Good lord!" he exclaimed, "I'd no idea it was so late—I feel half asleep." He picked up his brief case, stifled a yawn, and smiled benignly at us.

"Happy dreams, everybody," he said.

∞ ∞ ∞

LAY THAT RAZOR DOWN!

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EYES OF SILENCE

by E.C. TUBB



The Eyes of Silence

by E. C. Tubb

Illustrated by ENGLE

THE CELL was ten feet long, eight feet high and six wide. It held the bare essentials for sleeping, washing and sanitation. The walls were coated with a spongy green plastic, almost indestructable, seamless and sound-proof. The single light came from behind a transparent panel in the ceiling. The door was a sheet of one-way glass perforated with countless tiny holes for ventilation. There was no window. It was a modern version of a medieval oubliette.

Ward Hammond had lived in it for two years.

He lay back on the cot and stared up at the ceiling. A big man, pale from long confinement, his muscles wasted, his skin soft. He wore a loose shirt and slacks of a drab gray with soft slippers of the same color. He had no belt, no tie, no underwear. The clothing was made of paper and was renewed every ten days. It tore easily and had so little mechanical strength that a rope made from it broke at the

slightest strain. Suicide was actively discouraged.

Insanity was not.

It was easy to go insane when locked in a narrow cell twenty-four hours a day. It was easy because there was nothing else to do. Society, after other experiments had failed, had come to the conclusion that people were sent to prison to be punished and that, as long as actual physical hardship was avoided, the punishment was justified. So, for the prisoners, the world ceased to exist. Everything ceased to exist but the narrow confines of their cells, the constant light, the constant loneliness. Madness, to them, was escape. Literal escape.

A whisper of sound came from the corridor and Ward tensed, twisting on the cot so as to bring his ear tight against the perforated door. From the cell to his right came a faint mumbling, from the one to his left nothing but silence. That wasn't so strange; little sound escaped the cells and a man could scream

The choice was his: a solitary cell

on Earth, or a solitary cell in space

—and both paths led only to madness!

his throat raw and be heard only faintly by his immediate neighbors. The watch-guard listening over the spy-mikes in each cell, on the other hand, could hear everything clearly.

The whisper of sound came closer, magnified by a trick of acoustics, different from the soft-footed tread of the dispenser at mealtimes or the deliberately erratic watch-patrols. These sounds were made by hard shoes. Ward sat upright as the sounds halted at his door. He smiled as the panel slid aside and two men entered the cell.

"More tests?" Ward moved along the cot, making room if the others wished to sit. One of them was a guard, a quiet man with a thoughtful face and a uniform which matched the green plastic of the walls. He held a gas gun which he kept pointed towards Ward. The other man was a civilian. He wore a dark business suit and carried a folder of papers beneath his arm. He did not look

like a psychologist, but appearances meant nothing.

"No tests. At least, not in the way you're thinking." The civilian smiled as he sat on the edge of the cot. "My name is Fromach."

"You know mine," said Ward. He glanced towards the guard, standing just inside the locked door, his gun at the ready. His companion couldn't be seen but Ward knew that he would be standing just outside. It was the old, familiar pattern, one guard inside ready to release a cloud of stunning gas if Ward made an aggressive move, the other to watch from absolute safety. There could be no escapes from the prison.

"Ward Hammond, engineer, sentenced to a term of seven years' imprisonment for a non-violent crime," said Fromach easily. "Correct?"

"You know it is." Ward looked at Fromach. "What's all this about?"

"You have served two of your

seven years," said Fromach, reading from his papers. "During that time you have proved a model prisoner, showing a high stability index and an intelligent acceptance of your environment here." He lifted his head, smiling. "In other words you haven't flown into violent rages, tried to commit suicide, beat down the walls or anything equally stupid."

"Would it have done me any good if I had?"

"None at all."

"That's what I thought," said Ward. He leaned back against the wall, enjoying the company, the sound of another voice, the feel of conversation on his lips and tongue. "Acting up is the quickest way to get certified for lobotomy."

"And automatic release," reminded Fromach. "Don't forget that."

"I came into this place a man," said Ward tightly. "I intend leaving the same way, not as a brain-slashed zombi."

"A lobotomized prisoner is deemed to no longer be the individual who committed the crime for which he was sentenced," said Fromach. "You could volunteer for it."

"No." Ward was curt. "And they can't do it to me unless I'm judged insane by two doctors. Even a prisoner has some rights."

"They will be respected," said Fromach. "You can stay in this cell for another five years and, if you remain sane, you will not be touched." He wet his lips with the tip of his tongue. "If you remain sane."

"I will," said Ward.

"I wonder?" Fromach looked at the cell, at the green walls and opaque door. He prodded the mattress, solidly constructed as an integral part of the immovable bed. The sanitation arrangements did not trap water, and shaving was done by a non-poisonous cream which removed hair and stunned the follicles for several days. Ward guessed his thoughts.

"Suicide is a symptom of insanity. That's out too."

"Over fifty per cent of all long-term prisoners eventually attempt suicide," said Fromach casually. "Some of the methods employed are very ingenious. None are successful."

"So?"

"So what makes you think that you are different from other men?" Fromach stared at the prisoner. "Five years is a long time, Ward, a very long time."

"I like my own company," said Ward. He looked at the guard, then back at Fromach. "What are you trying to do, upset me?"

"No." Fromach busied himself with his papers. "I'm here

to offer you a choice, Ward. You can stay in this cell for the remainder of your term." He smiled. "Or you can leave here within ten days."

"Leave!" Ward stared his disbelief. "Is this your idea of a joke?"

"It is no joke," said Fromach, and now he was no longer smiling. "I'm perfectly serious. If you wish you can leave this cell and this prison within ten days. The choice is yours."

"If I wish!" Ward shook his head, wondering that there could be any doubt. Then he caught on. "All right," he said flatly. "What's the catch?"

Fromach told him.

THE SPACESHIP CABIN was, if anything, worse than the cell, but Ward didn't mind. He lay on the bunk and stared at the curved segment of the hull beyond his feet and listened to all the little, man-made sounds which filtered through to him from the other parts of the ship. Footsteps, the muted hum of conversation, a cough. Mingled with the man-made sounds were others—mechanical clickings, the soft purr of the air-conditioners, the almost inaudible vibration of the engines.

The door clicked open and Fromach entered the cabin. He locked the door behind him, smiling apologetically at Ward.

"Sorry, but you are still a prisoner and the regulations have to be obeyed."

"You'll have to start trusting me soon," reminded Ward. "Why not now?"

"I know," said Fromach. "There's no logic in it, but when has officialdom ever been logical?" He sat on the edge of the bunk. "No regrets?"

"No regrets." Ward stared at the metal hull. "Some questions, though."

"Yes?"

"You explained why I was chosen," said Ward. "I've lived for two years in solitary confinement and remained sane. That's the sort of test you couldn't give to normal volunteers. But why not use more than one man at a station?"

"Two men are out," said Fromach. "The psychological tension would be too great and they'd be murdering each other before the first year. Three men are better but the tension still exists. Two of them would gang up on the third, or one of them would think that the other two were against him—it comes to the same thing. Four men? Five? Seven? Seven might work but then we hit the supply factor. Seven men require seven times the amount of food, water and air needed for one. The watch-stations aren't big and such supplies are out of the question."

"Is that the only reason?"

"No." Fromach stared directly at Ward. "There are two other reasons. One is that it costs a lot of money to staff a watch-station. A man expects to finish his five-year term a rich man. So the pay has to be high to attract volunteers and even then they demand a satisfactory contract. Free medical attention, free entertainment, free this and free that. And if they break, as they always do, we still have to pay for the full term."

"I see." Ward smiled as he thought about it. "And you said that officialdom wasn't logical. What could be more logical than offering a prisoner the chance to work out his term on a watch-station? No arguments about pay, no extreme demands, no trouble about finding volunteers. Simply the offer to exchange a cell on Earth for a larger one somewhere in space or on one of the satellites. Simple."

"Not so simple," said Fromach. "We have to choose the right man, someone with some basic understanding of engineering and electronics, someone who has been sentenced for a non-violent crime, someone who has proved that he can stand being on his own for a long period and who still has many years to go before obtaining his freedom. There aren't many of them."

"I should have asked for more money," said Ward. He stretched. "A credit a day isn't much."

"A hundredth of what a normal volunteer would expect," admitted Fromach. "But better than nothing."

"Better than I was getting," said Ward. He frowned up at the ceiling. "What happens to the volunteers when they break? They do break, don't they?"

"Yes."

"All the time?"

"Yes." Fromach didn't seem to want to talk about it. "The average volunteer lasts two years or less. We pick them up, provide a relief, and fetch them back for treatment."

"What sort of treatment? Lobotomy?"

"No. Lobotomy can only be given with the full consent of the patient or his relatives. Not many give that consent."

"I don't blame them," said Ward feelingly. "I've seen some of those zombis and I'd hate for anyone I knew to become like them." He paused, a small knot of fear gathering in his stomach. "How do I stand on that?"

"You are a prisoner," said Fromach carefully. "The fact that you have chosen to serve your term on a watch-station instead of in a prison makes no difference to your status. If you go insane you will automatically be lobotomized."

"I see." Modern society wasted no pity or false sentiment on its criminals. The answer, obviously, was to remain sane. He smiled at Fromach. "Was that the second reason?"

"What?"

"You said that there were two other reasons for choosing me. You've told me one of them. Have you told me the other?"

"In a way." Fromach rose and unlocked the door. He paused with the panel half-open. "The true reason, of course, contains all the others. Think about it." He left, the door locking behind him. Alone, Ward relaxed as he had learned to do during the past two years. He didn't have to wonder just what Fromach had meant. The logic was too obvious to be missed.

Criminals were expendable.

THE WATCH-STATION was a laminated dome set on the ice of Callisto. It held instruments connected to the probe-beacons, instruments for cosmiray counting, instruments to measure the variations in orbits of the other eight satellites revolving around the immense bulk of Jupiter. It held instruments to record any and everything which went on in space around it, together with instruments to record the findings on magnetized tape.

It also held living space for one man.

The operation of the watch-station was almost wholly automatic, the human element only being necessary to guard against minor breakdowns and the remote possibility of anything going seriously wrong. Fromach explained it before he left.

"We've watch-stations like this scattered over the entire Solar System. We've got them on every satellite, most of the asteroids and even in free-orbit. They do nothing but collect data, lots of data, and we come on regular schedule to collect the filled tapes."

"How regular?"

"About once a year, maybe not for two years, it doesn't matter."

"Not to the machines, it doesn't," agreed Ward. "But what about me?"

"Your job is to keep watch on the machines. See that the pile isn't acting up, or the probe-beacons or the recording instruments. Your main job will be general maintenance."

"Janitor's work," said Ward. He was disappointed. "Is that all?"

"It's enough." Fromach held out his hand. "Well, goodbye, Ward."

"I'll be seeing you." Ward gripped the proffered hand. "Couple more questions. Any radio?"

"Only local. The static is too

bad for any distance." Fromach was impatient to get away. "Anything else?"

"One more thing. What do you do with all this data you're collecting?"

"We feed it to a big computer back on Earth. One day, if we get enough data, we'll be able to find out everything about the place where we live." Fromach waved, stepped to the exit port, was gone. Minutes later the ship left too.

Ward was alone.

He didn't let it worry him. There was too much to occupy him for that. He checked the instruments and found the manuals. He fixed himself some food from the stores and brewed some coffee. He found a small library of tattered books, some magnetic, three-dimensional jigsaws and some other assorted items collected over the years by previous attendants who had had their own ideas of how to relieve the monotony.

He chuckled at the assortment. None of the previous attendants had had his experience. Two years in a small cell without company, books or recreation of any kind had made him indifferent to toys. To Ward, five years in this place promised to be a snap.

At first the time passed easily enough. He checked everything there was to be checked, read

everything there was to be read, played with the three-dimensional jigsaws and other toys, and sampled various combinations of food from the storerooms. He even tried to regain his lost fitness with a series of self-invented exercises. He didn't succeed. The confined quarters and the lack of equipment reduced his activities to a program of bends, push-ups and muscular tension, valuable back home but here, because of the low gravity, almost useless.

The first shock came when he tried to make a closer examination of the installations.

There were no tools in the entire station. There was nothing with which he could strip the paneling, dismantle the machines and get at the wiring. No means by which he could effect repairs if they ever became necessary. He searched three times, moving everything moveable and opening every cabinet and locker he could find; but the results were the same. No tools. He sat down to think about it.

Fromach had lied. Perhaps not all the way but certainly some of it. A watch-station attendant was supposed to be able to maintain the station in case of breakdown, and no one could do that without the use of tools. There were no tools, so. . . .

Ward smiled as he guessed the reason. The previous attend-

ant had gone off the beam. He himself had been dumped in a hurry without any apparent check being made of the station. Perhaps the previous attendant had disposed of the tools in some way, thrown them outside or something. He could have done it as a last gesture of sanity, to prevent himself from wrecking the installations.

It was a logical explanation, very logical, only it wasn't correct.

There was no way to leave the station.

THAT was the second shock, and Ward thought about it on and off during the next few months. The air lock was sealed and could not be opened from the inside. There was no suit, no window, and the sanitation arrangements were incapable of passing anything hard and large. It was a problem among other problems, and every now and again he took it out, let his mind worry it, then put it away again. What concerned him most was the passage of time.

Fromach had said that the relief ship called about once a year, maybe once every two years. There was a calendar clock mounted on the main panel, and Ward took to staring at it, wishing that the hands would revolve faster. Finally, recognizing the danger, he covered the dial with

a wrapping from a food carton and tried to forget that it existed. His training helped there. Time is a variable; it passes quickly or slowly depending on the circumstances and the individual. Anticipate and it passes slowly; forget and it speeds up. Two years in a modern oubliette without clocks, calendars or sunlight had taught him to forget time.

But forgetting time, unanswerable problems, questions of motive and the previous attendants left a void. It was filled with loneliness.

Real loneliness. Utter loneliness. A loneliness unknown anywhere on Earth. For no matter where a man may be on his home planet he is never really alone. Always, around him, there is life, familiar, understandable life. A lighthouse keeper is not alone, not when he can signal for help, listen to voices on the radio, keep pets. A prisoner, even in an oubliette, is not really alone, not when his every word is caught and listened to, not when patrolling guards pace the corridors and he can gain company by yelling for it.

A man, alone in a room, is not truly alone when he is surrounded by other people in the same house. But a man on a sterile world, millions of miles away from any other form of life, utterly divorced from his

own kind, is really alone.

And Ward had never been truly alone before.

It began to worry him. He began to visualize every result of every circumstance. He could trip and break a bone, fall ill, need medical attention. The food could go bad, the water stale; the power could fail. The dome could spring a leak, the ice on which it was built begin to melt, the satellite even fall from orbit towards Jupiter.

And no one could help him.

It was an uncomfortable sensation and he fought against it. He busied himself about the station, dusting, polishing, looking at the rows of signal lights on the main panel. He even tested the radio again, receiving, as before, nothing but a surging wash of static. He listened to it for a while, then switched off, his skin goose-pimpling to the utter emptiness of the sound. There was nothing remotely human about it, nothing warm and familiar, just the sea-sound of empty space, of radiating atoms, planetary fields and cold emptiness.

Time passed. He ate when he was hungry, washed when he was dirty, slept when he was able. And all the time the terrible sense of loneliness increased so that he wanted to run, to scream, to escape. The previous attendants must have felt

like that. They had wanted to escape too, and they had done it in the only way they could. He could follow their example.

But if he did, the results, for him, would be far worse than for the others. Automatic lobotomy and a loss of his individuality. Living death.

Ward gritted his teeth and fought even harder. He filled his time with endless repetitions of routine tasks, stacking and restacking the food cartons, polishing and repolishing until his arm ached.

And then he began to get the impression that he was being watched.

THE STOREROOM was ten feet long, eight feet high and six wide. It normally contained enough concentrates to last a man for a long time. Now the cartons were stacked in an untidy heap outside the closed door. Fromach stared at them, then at the doctor by his side.

"Ready?"

"Ready," said the doctor. He lifted his hypo-gun and touched the button. A thin spray darkened the air—drugs expelled so fast that they would penetrate thin clothing and skin without pain.

"Let's get it over." Fromach opened the door and stepped into the room, the doctor at his heels.

Ward sat up and smiled at them.

"You took your time," he said. "I expected you days ago."

"We had to come a long way," said Fromach absently. He stared at Ward as if unable to believe his eyes. "We didn't expect to find you like this."

"You thought that I'd gone insane." Ward sat up and moved along the cot to make room for the others. He had transferred it from the sleeping quarters into the cleared out storeroom. "Well, I almost did." He shivered at recent memories.

"I can't understand it," said the doctor. He looked a little foolish with the unwanted hypogun in his hand. He slipped it into a pocket. "I expected to find you in catatonia."

"Like the others?" Ward shrugged. "You almost did—but my training," he smiled at the replica of his cell, "and the threat of lobotomy saved me." He lost his smile. "Even at that the temptation to escape in the only way possible, back into childhood, was almost irresistible."

"You fought it," said the doctor. "Incredible!"

"You knew," said Fromach suddenly.

"No."

"But?"

"But I know now," said Ward. He stretched, relishing

the company, the nearness of the others. "Living in a cell can do peculiar things," he said. "You get so that you can sense more than others. I could always tell, for instance, when someone was at the spy-mike. I don't know how or why, I just did. Maybe, when you've nothing else to do, your senses tend to become more acute."

"Tell me about it," said the doctor. "What is it that drives men insane out here?"

"Loneliness."

"Just that?"

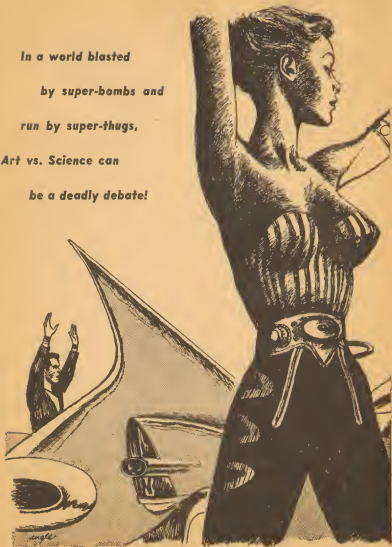
"Just that." Ward stared into distance. "It gets you after a time. I can't describe it—no one who hasn't experienced it can imagine it—but it's like being the last men left alive in the entire universe. The last living thing left. Few men can live with themselves, fewer have to; and when the loneliness hits them they can't take it. They want to run, to escape, to hide themselves from themselves. You know what happens then."

"How did you find out?" said Fromach. He was more interested in his own failure.

"The lack of tools gave me a clue," said Ward. "I guessed then that I was here for some other reason than maintaining the station. Then there were other things—the seeming lack of any logic behind it all, things

Continued on page 109

***In a world blasted
by super-bombs and
run by super-thugs,
Art vs. Science can
be a deadly debate!***



by FRITZ LEIBER

FRIENDS AND ENEMIES

THE SUN hadn't quite risen, but now that the five men were out from under the trees it already felt hot. Far ahead, off to the left of the road, the spires

of New Angeles gleamed dusky blue against the departing night. The two unarmed men gazed back wistfully at the little town, dark and asleep under its moist leafy

Illustrated by ENGLE



umbrellas. The one who was thin and had hair flecked with gray looked all intellect; the other, young and with a curly mop, looked all feeling.

The fat man barring their way back to town mopped his head. The two young men flanking him with shotgun and squirt-gun hadn't started to sweat yet.

The fat man stuffed the big handkerchief back in his pocket, wiped his hands on his shirt, rested his wrists lightly on the pistols holstered either side his stomach, looked at the two unarmed men, indicated the hot road with a nod, and said, "There's your way, professors. Get going."

The thin man looked at the hand-smears on the fat man's shirt. "But you haven't even explained to me," he protested softly, "why I'm being turned out of Ozona College."

"Look here, Mr. Ellenby, I've tried to make it easy for you," the fat man said. "I'm doing it before the town wakes up. Would you rather be chased by a mob?"

"But why—?"

"Because we found out you weren't just a math teacher, Mr. Ellenby." The fat man's voice went hard. "You'd been a physicist once. Nuclear physicist."

The young man with the shotgun spat. Ellenby watched the spittle curl in the dust like

a little brown worm. He shifted his gaze to a dead eucalyptus leaf. "I'd like to talk to the college board of regents," he said tonelessly.

"I'm the board of regents," the fat man told him. "Didn't you even know that?"

At this point the other unarmed man spoke up loudly. "But that doesn't explain my case. I've devoted my whole life to warning people against physicists and other scientists. How they'd smash us with their bombs. How they were destroying our minds with 3D and telefax and handies. How they were blaspheming against Nature, killing all imagination, crushing all beauty out of life!"

"I'd shut my mouth if I were you, Madson," the fat man said critically, "or at least lower my voice. When I mentioned a mob, I wasn't fooling. I saw them burn Cal Tech. In fact, I got a bit excited and helped."

The young man with the shotgun grinned.

"Cal Tech," Ellenby murmured, his eyes growing distant. "Cal Tech burns and Ozona stands."

"Ozona stands for the decencies of life," the fat man grated, "not alphabet bombs and pituitary gas. Its purpose is to save a town, not help kill a world."

"But why should I be driven out?" Madson persisted. "I'm

IT'S BEEN three years since a new Fritz Leiber story has appeared in any magazine. That's much too long, especially when you remember the subtly controlled fury of stories like "Coming Attraction" and "Poor Superman." But now Leiber has returned to full-time writing, and "Friends and Enemies," one of the first results, will rank with the best he's done!

just a poet singing the beauties of the simple life unmarred by science."

"Not simple enough for Ozona!" the fat man snorted. "We happen to know, Mr. Poet Madson, that you've written some stories about free love. We don't want anyone telling Ozona girls it's all right to be careless."

"But those were just ideas, ideas in a story," Madson protested. "I wasn't advocating—"

"No difference," the fat man cut him short. "Talk to a woman about ideas and pretty soon she gets some." His voice became almost kindly. "Look here, if you wanted a woman without getting hitched to her, why didn't you go to shantytown?"

Madson squared his shoulders. "You've missed the whole point. I'd never do such a thing. I never have."

"Then you shouldn't have boasted," the fat man said. "And you shouldn't have fooled around with Councilman Clasen's daughter."

At the name, Ellenby came out of his trance and looked sharply at Madson, who said

indignantly, "I wasn't fooling around with Vera-Ellen, whatever her crazy father says. She came to my office because she has poetic ability and I wanted to encourage it."

"Yeah, so she'd encourage you," the fat man finished. "That girl's wild enough already, which I suppose is what you mean by poetic ability. And in this town, her father's word counts." He hitched up his belt. "And now, professors, it's time you started."

Madson and Ellenby looked at each other doubtfully. The young man with the squirtgun raised its acid-etched muzzle. The fat man looked hard at Madson and Ellenby. "I think I hear alarm clocks going off," he said quietly.

They watched the two men trudge a hundred yards, watched Ellenby shift the rolled-up towel under his elbow to the other side, watched Madson pause to thumb tobacco into a pipe and glance carelessly back, then shove the pipe in his pocket and go on hurriedly.

"Couple of pretty harmless

coots, if you ask me," the young man with the shotgun observed.

"Sure," the fat man agreed, "but we got to remember peoples' feelings and keep Ozona straight. We don't like mobs or fear or girls gone wild."

The young man with the shotgun grinned. "That Vera-Ellen," he murmured, shaking his head.

"You better keep *your* mind off her too," the fat man said sourly. "She's wild enough without anybody to encourage her poetic ability or anything else. It's a good thing we gave those two their walking papers."

"They'll probably walk right into the arms of the Harvey gang," the young man with the squirtgun remarked, "especially if they try to short-cut."

"Pretty small pickings for Harvey, those two," the young man with the shotgun countered.

"Which won't please him at all."

The fat man shrugged. "Their own fault. If only they'd had sense enough to keep their mouths shut. Early in life."

"They don't seem to realize it's 1993," said the young man with the shotgun.

The fat man nodded. "Come on," he said, turning back toward the town and the coolness. "We've done our duty."

The young man with the squirtgun took a last look. "There they go, Art and Sci-

ence," he observed with satisfaction. "Those two subjects always did make my head ache."

ON THE HOT ROAD Madson began to stride briskly. His nostrils flared. "Smell the morning air," he commanded. "It's good, good!"

Ellenby, matching his stride with longer if older legs, looked at him with mild wonder.

"Smell the hot sour grass," Madson continued. "It's things like this man was meant for, not machines and formulas. Look at the dew. Have you seen the dew in years? Look at it on that spiderweb!"

The physicist paused obediently to observe the softly twinkling strands. "Perfect catenaries," he murmured.

"What?"

"A kind of curve," Ellenby explained. "The locus of the focus of a parabola rolling on a straight line."

"Locus-focus hocus-pocus!" Madson snorted. "Reducing the wonders of Nature to chalk marks. It's disgusting."

Suddenly each tiny drop of dew turned blood-red. Ellenby turned his back on the spiderweb, whipped a crooked little brass tube from an inside pocket and squinted through it.

"What's that?" Madson asked.

"Spectroscope," Ellenby explained. "Early morning spectra

of the sun are fascinating."

Madson huffed. "There you go. Analyzing. Tearing beauty apart. It's a disease." He paused. "Say, won't you hurt your eyes?"

Turning back, Ellenby shook his head. "I keep a smoked glass on it," he said. "I'm always hoping that some day I'll get a glimpse of an atomic bomb explosion."

"You mean to say you've missed all the dozens they dropped on this country? That's too bad."

"The ball of fire's quite fleeting. The opportunities haven't been as good as you think."

"But you're a physicist, aren't you? Don't you people have all sorts of lovely photographs to gloat over in your laboratories?"

"Atomic bomb spectra were never declassified," Ellenby told him wistfully. "At least not in my part of the project. I've never seen one."

"Well, you'll probably get your chance," Madson told him harshly. "If you've been reading your dirty telefax, you'll know the Hot Truce is coming to a boil. And the Angeles area will be a prime target." Ellenby nodded mutely.

They trudged on. The sun began to beat on their backs like an open fire. Ellenby turned up his collar. He watched his companion thoughtfully. Finally he said, "So you're the Madson who

wrote those *Enemies of Science* stories about a world ruled by poets. It never occurred to me back at Ozona. And that non-fiction book about us—what was it called?"

"*Murderers of Imagination*," Madson growled. "And it would have been a good thing if you'd listened to my warnings instead of going on building machines and dissecting Nature and destroying all the lovely myths that make life worthwhile."

"Are you sure that Nature is so lovely and kind?" Ellenby ventured. Madson did not deign to answer.

They passed a crossroad leading, the battered sign said, one way to Palmdale, the other to San Bernardino. They were perhaps a hundred yards beyond it when Ellenby let go a little chuckle. "I have a confession to make. When I was very young I wrote an article about how children shouldn't be taught the Santa Claus myth or any similar fictions."

Madson laughed sardonically. "A perfect member of your dry-souled tribe! Worrying about Santa Claus, when all the while something very different was about to come flying down from over the North Pole and land on our housetops."

"We did try to warn people about the intercontinental missiles," Ellenby reminded him.

"Yes, without any success. The last two reindeer—Donner and Blitzen!"

Ellenby nodded glumly, but he couldn't keep a smile off his face for long. "I wrote another article too—it was never published—about how poetry is completely pointless, how rhymes inevitably distort meanings, and so on."

Madson whirled on him with a peal of laughter. "So you even thought you were big enough to wreck poetry!" He jerked a limp, thinnish volume from his coat pocket. "You thought you could destroy this!"

Ellenby's expression changed. He reached for the book, but Madson held it away from him. Ellenby said, "That's Keats, isn't it?"

"How would you know?"

Ellenby hesitated. "Oh, I got to like some of his poetry, quite a while after I wrote the article." He paused again and looked squarely at Madson. "Also, Vera-Ellen was reading me some pieces out of that volume. I guess you'd loaned it to her."

"Vera-Ellen?" Madson's jaw dropped.

Ellenby nodded. "She had trouble with her geometry. Some conferences were necessary." He smiled. "We physicists aren't such a dry-souled tribe, you know."

Madson looked outraged.

"Why, you're old enough to be her father!"

"Or her husband," Ellenby replied coolly. "Young women are often attracted to father images. But all that can't make any difference to us now."

"You're right," Madson said shortly. He shoved the poetry volume back in his pocket, flirted the sweat out of his eyes, and looked around with impatience. "Say, you're going to New Angeles, aren't you?" he asked, and when Ellenby nodded uncertainly, said, "Then let's cut across the fields. This road is taking us out of our way." And without waiting for a reply he jumped across the little ditch to the left of the road and into the yellowing wheat field. Ellenby watched him for a moment, then hitched his rolled towel further up under his arm and followed.

IT WAS stifling in the field. The wheat seemed to paralyze any stray breezes. Their boots hissed against the dry stems. Far off they heard a lazy drumming. After a while they came to a wide, brimful irrigation ditch. They could see that some hundreds of feet ahead it was crossed by a little bridge. They followed the ditch.

Ellenby felt strangely giddy, as if he were looking at everything through a microscope. That may have been due to the

tremendous size of the wheat, its spikes almost as big as corncobs, the spikelets bigger than kernels—rich orange stuff taut with flour. But then they came to a section marred by larger and larger splotches of a powdery purple blight.

The lazy drumming became louder. Ellenby was the first to see the low-swinging helicopter with its thick, trailing plume of greenish mist. He knocked Madson on the shoulder and both men started to run. Purple dust puffed. Once Ellenby stumbled and Madson stopped to jerk him to his feet. Still they would have escaped except that the copter swerved toward them. A moment later they were enveloped in sweet oily fumes.

Madson heard jeering laughter, glimpsed a grotesquely long-nosed face peering down from above. Then, through the cloud, Ellenby squeaked, "Don't breathe!" and Madson felt himself dragged roughly into the ditch. The water closed over him with a splash.

Puffing and blowing, he came to his feet—the water hardly reached his waist—to find himself being dragged by Ellenby toward the bridge. It was all he could do to keep his footing on the muddy bottom. By the time he got breath enough to voice his indignation, Ellenby was saying, "That's far enough. The

stuff's settling away from us. Now strip and scrub yourself."

Ellenby unrolled the towel he'd held tightly clutched to his side all the while, and produced a bar of soap. In response to Madson's question he explained, "That fungicide was probably TTTR or some other relative of the nerve-gas family. They are absorbed through the skin."

Seconds later Madson was scouring his head and chest. He hesitated at his trousers, muttering, "They'll probably have me for indecent exposure. Claim I was trying to start a nudist colony as well as a free-love cult." But Ellenby's warning had been a chilly one.

Ellenby soaped Madson's back and he in turn soaped the older man's ridgy one.

"I suppose that's why he had an elephant's nose," Madson mused.

"What?"

"Man in the copter," Madson explained. "Wearing a respirator."

Ellenby nodded and made them move nearer the bridge for a change of water.

They started to scrub their clothes, rinse and wring them, and lay them on the bank to dry. They watched the copter buzzing along in the distance, but it didn't seem inclined to come near again. Madson felt impelled to say, "You know, it's your

chemist friends who have introduced that viciousness into the common man's spirit, giving him horrible poisons to use against Nature. Otherwise he wouldn't have tried to douse us with that stuff."

"He just acted like an ordinary farmer to me," Ellenby replied, scrubbing vigorously.

"Think we're safe?" Madson asked.

Ellenby shrugged. "We'll discover," he said briefly.

MADSON SHIVERED, but the rhythmic job was soothing. After a bit he began to feel almost playful. Lathering his shirt, he got some fine large bubbles, held them so he could see their colors flow in the sunlight.

"Tiny perfect worlds of every hue," he murmured. "Violet, blue, green, yellow, orange, red."

"And dead black," Ellenby added.

"You would say something like that!" Madson grunted. "What did you think I was talking about?"

"Bubbles."

"Maybe some of your friends' poisons have black bubbles," Madson said bitingly. "But I was talking about these."

"So was I. Give me your pipe."

The authority in Ellenby's

voice made Madson look around startledly. "Give me your pipe," Ellenby repeated firmly, holding out his hand.

Madson fished it out of the pocket of the trousers he was about to wash and handed it over. Ellenby knocked out the soggy tobacco, swished it in the water a few times, and began to soap the inside of the bowl.

Madson started to object, but, "You'd be washing it anyway," Ellenby assured him. "Now look here, Madson, I'm going to blow a bubble and I want you to watch. I want you to observe Nature for all you're worth. If poets and physicists have one thing in common it's that they're both supposed to be able to observe. Accurately."

He took a breath. "Now see, I'm going to hold the pipe mouth down and let the bubble hang from it, but with one side of the bowl tipped up a bit, so that the strain on the bubble's skin will be greatest on that side."

He blew a big bubble, held the pipe with one hand and pointed with a finger of the other. "There's the place to watch now. There!" The bubble burst.

"What was that?" Madson asked in a new voice. "It really was black for an instant, dull like soot."

"A bubble bursts because its skin gets thinner and thinner,"

Ellenby said. "When it gets thin enough it shows colors, as interference eliminates different wavelengths. With yellow eliminated it shows violet, and so on. But finally, just for a moment at the place where it's going to break, the skin becomes only one molecule thick. Such a monomolecular layer absorbs all light, hence shows as dead black."

"Everything's got a black lining, eh?"

"Black can be beautiful. Here, I'll do it again."

Madson put his hand on Ellenby's shoulder to steady himself. They were standing hip-deep in water, their bodies still flecked with suds. Their heads were inches from the new bubble. As it burst a voice floated down to them.

"Is this the Ozona Faculty Kindergarten?"

They whirled around, simultaneously crouching in the water.

"Vera-Ellen, what are you doing here?" Madson demanded.

"Watching the kiddies play," the girl on the bridge replied, running a hand through her touseled violet hair. She looked down at her slacks and jacket. "Wish I'd brought my swim suit, though I gather it wouldn't be expected."

"Vera-Ellen!" Madson said apprehensively.

"It doesn't look very inviting down there, though," she mused.

"Guess I'll wait for Aqua Heaven at New Angeles."

"You're going to New Angeles?" Ellenby put in. It is not easy to be conversationally brilliant while squatting chest deep in muddy water, acutely conscious of the absence of clothes.

Vera-Ellen nodded lazily, leaning on the railing. "Going to get me a city job. With its reduced faculty Ozona holds no more intellectual interest for me. Did you know math's going to be made part of the Home Eck department, Mr. Ellenby?"

"But how did you know that we—"

"Daughter of the man who got you run out of town ought to know what the old bully's up to. And if you're worrying that they'll come after me and find us together, I'll just head along by myself."

Madson and Ellenby both protested, though it is even harder to protest effectively than to be conversationally brilliant while squatting naked in coffee-colored water.

Vera-Ellen said, "All right, so quit playing and let's get on. You have to tell me all about New Angeles and the kind of jobs we'll get."

"But—?"

"Modest, eh? I'm afraid Pa wouldn't count it in your favor. But all right." She turned her

back and sauntered to the other side of the bridge.

MADSON and Ellenby cautiously climbed out of the ditch, brushed the water from their skins, and wormed into their soggy clothes.

"We've got to persuade her to go back," Madson whispered.

"Vera-Ellen?" Ellenby replied and raised his eyebrows.

Madson groaned softly.

"Cheer up," Ellenby said. And he seemed in a cheerful humor himself when they climbed to the bridge. "Vera-Ellen," he said, "we've been having an argument as to whether man ruined Nature or Nature ruined man to start with."

"Is this a class, Mr. Ellenby?"

"Of sorts," he told her. Behind him Madson snorted, flipping his Keats to dry the pages. They started off together.

"Well," said Vera-Ellen, "I like Nature and I like . . . human beings. And I don't feel ruined at all. Where's the argument?"

"What about the bombs?" Madson demanded automatically. "By man our physicist here means Technology. Whereas I mean—"

"Oh, the bombs," she said with a shrug. "What sort of job do you think I should get in New Angeles?"

"Well . . ." Madson began.

"Say, I'm getting hungry,"

she raced on, turning to Ellenby.

"So am I," he agreed.

They looked at the road ahead. A jagged hill now hid all but the tips of the spires of New Angeles. On the top of the hill was a tremendous house with sagging roofs of cracked tiles, stucco walls dark with rain stains and green with moss yet also showing cracks, and windows of age-blued glass, some splintered, flashing in the sun, which tempted Ellenby to whip out his spectroscope.

Curving down from the house came a weedy and balding expanse that had obviously once been a well-tended lawn. A few stalwart patches of thick grass held out tenaciously.

Pale-trunked eucalyptus trees towered behind the house and to either side of the road where it curved over the hill.

In a hollow at the foot of the one-time lawn, just where it met the road, something gleamed. As Madson, Ellenby and Vera-Ellen tramped forward, they saw it was an old automobile, one of the jet antiques that were the rage around 1970—in fact, a Lunar '69. Coming closer Ellenby realized that it had custom-built features, such as jet brakes and collision springs.

A man with an odd cap was poking a probe into the air intake, while in the back seat a woman was sitting, shadowed

by a hat four feet across. At the sound of their footsteps the man whirled to his feet, quickly enough though unsteadily. He stared at them, wagging the probe. Just at that moment something that looked like an animated orange furpiece leaped from the tonneau.

"George!" the woman cried. "Widgie's got away."

The small flattish creature came on in undulating bounds. It was past the man in the cap before he could turn. It headed for Ellenby, then changed direction. Madson made an impulsive dive for it, but it widened itself still more and sailed over him straight into Vera-Allen's arms.

They walked toward the car. Widgie wriggled, Vera-Allen stroked his ears. He seemed to be a flying fox of some sort. The man eyed them hostilely, raising the probe. Madson stared puzzledly at the cap. Out of his older knowledge Ellenby whispered an explanation: "Chaufeur."

The woman stood in the back seat, swaying slightly. She was wearing a white swim suit and dark teleglasses under her hat. At first she seemed a somewhat ravaged thirty. Then they began to see the rest of the wrinkles.

SHE RECEIVED Widgie from Vera-Allen, shook him out and tucked him under her arm,

where he hung limply, moving his tiny red eyes.

"Come in with me, my dear," she told Vera-Allen. "George, put down that crazy pole. Pay no attention to George—he can't recognize gentlefolk when he sees them, especially when he's drunk. Gentlemen," she continued, waving graciously to Madson and Ellenby, "you have the thanks of Rickie Vickson." As she pronounced the name she surveyed them sharply. Her gaze settled on Ellenby. "You know me, don't you?"

"Certainly," he answered instantly. "You were my first—my favorite straight 3D star."

"Are you in 3D?" Vera-Allen asked, a sudden gleam in her eyes.

"Was, my dear," Rickie said grandly. She ogled Ellenby through the fish-eye glasses. "Ah, straight 3D," she sighed. "Simple video-audio in depth—there was a great art-form." She began to sway again and they caught the reek of alcohol. "You know, gentlemen, it was handies that ruined my career. I had the looks and the voice, but I lacked the touch. Something in me shrank from the whole idea—be still, Widgie—and the girls with itchy fingers took over. But I'm talking too much about myself. It's hot and you wonderful gentlemen must be thirsty. Here, have a—"

The chauffeur glared at her as she reached fumblingly down into the tonneau. She caught the look and quailed slightly.

"—sandwich," she finished, coming up with a shiny can.

Madson accepted it from her, clicking the catch. The top popped four feet in the air, followed lazily by the uppermost sandwich which he caught deftly. He handed the can to Ellenby, who served himself and handed it up to Vera-Ellen. Soon all three of them were munching.

"Miss Vickson," Vera-Ellen asked between mouthfuls, "do you think I could get a job in broadcast entertainment?"

Rickie looked at her sideways, leaning away to focus. "Not with that ghastly atomglow hair," she said. "Violet is old hat this year—it's either black, blonde or bald. But give me your hand, my dear."

"Going to tell my fortune?"

"After a fashion." She held up Vera-Ellen's hand, squeezing and prodding it thoughtfully, as if she were testing the carcass of an alleged spring chicken. Then she nodded. "You'll do. Good strong hand, that's all that's needed, so you can really crunch the knuckles of the bohunks. They love it rough. Of course the technicians could step up the power when they broadcast your hand-squeeze, but the addicts don't feel it's the same

thing." She looked sourly at her own delicate claws. "Yes, my dear, you'll have a chance in handies if you don't mind cuddling with two million dirty-minded bohunks every night and if Rickie Vickson's still got any entree at the studios." She made a face and dipped again into the tonneau, apparently to gulp something, for the chauffeur's glare was intensified.

"You're from New Angeles?" Madson asked politely when Rickie came up beaming.

"Old Angeles," she corrected. "My home's in a contaminated area. After 3D lighting I've never been afraid of hard radiations. But this time my psychic counselor told me—Widgie, I'm going to put you away in a nice little urn—that the bombs are going to miss New Angeles and fall on Old. That's why George is jetting me to the mountains. Others drink to still their fears. I do something about it—too."

"You mean you're going *away* from the studio?" Vera-Ellen demanded incredulously while Ellenby mumbled "Bombs?" through a mouthful of sandwich.

"Of course," Rickie nodded. "Don't you know? Russia's touched a match to the Hot Truce. You charming gentlemen should keep up with these things."

"You see, I told you!" Madson said to Ellenby. "One more

victory for science!"

"Miss Vickson, we better be getting on," the chauffeur interrupted, speaking for the first time. His voice was drunkenly thick. "We aren't out of the fusion fringe by a long shot and I don't like the looks of this place."

Rickie ignored him. Ellenby asked, "Was the news about Russia telefaxed?"

"Of course not." Rickie's smile was scornful. "They never tell the real truth these days. But they said to get out of our houses, and what else could that mean?"

"Miss Vickson, we better—" George began again.

"Quiet, George," Rickie ordered.

George groaned faintly, shrugged his shoulders, and reached out an arm to her without looking. Rickie handed him a red, limp plastic bottle. Just as he was putting it to his lips, he jerked as if stung, vaulted into the car, and began to stamp and punch at the controls.

With a mighty *pouf* the jet took hold. Ellenby skittered away from the hot blast. The Lunar '69 jumped forward.

THINGS hissed and snicked through the air. From nowhere, men began to appear. With a great lurch the car gained the road, roared toward the bridge.

Vera-Allen jumped up as if to get out, then was thrown back into the tonneau. Rickie lunged forward across the seat to save the red bottle. Her four-foot hat leaped upward, hesitated, and then spun off like a flying saucer.

A man rose from the wheat near the bridge. As the car jounced across it, he leveled a rapid-fire weapon. But just as he got it trained on the car, Rickie's hat landed on him. He went over backwards, firing at the sky.

Madson and Ellenby looked around in bewilderment. There must have been a dozen men. As they stared, another bunch came hurrying down the ruined lawn from the house on the hill.

The man by the bridge got up, went over to Rickie's hat and stamped on it.

Madson and Ellenby jumped as the sky-climbing missiles from his gun pattered down around them. When they looked around again, the men from the house on the hill were closing in.

Their leader was about five feet tall, but thick. His head had been formed in a bullet mold, his features looked drop-forged.

"I'm Harvey," he told them blankly. "What you got?"

Harvey's people wore everything from evening dress to shorts. There were even two women (who drifted toward

Harvey) one in a gold kimono, the other in an off-the-bosom frock of filthy white lace. Everybody was armed.

"What you got?" Harvey repeated sharply. "I know you're loaded, I saw you talking with that rich-witch in the jet." He looked them over and grabbed at Madson's side pocket. "Books, huh?" he said like a hangman, dangling the Keats by a stray page. Then he turned to Ellenby. "Come on, Skinny," he said, "shell out."

When Ellenby hesitated, two of Harvey's men grabbed him, dumped him, and passed the contents of his pockets to their chief. When the spectroscope turned up, Harvey grinned. The eyes of his people twinkled in anticipation.

"Science gadget, huh?" he said. "Folks, there's been too much science in the world and too many words. Any minute now, more bombs are gonna fall. I do my humble bit to help 'em. I'm a great little junkman." He let the brass tube fall to the ground and lifted his foot. "Blow it a good-bye kiss, Skinny."

"Wait," Madson said abruptly, taking a step toward Harvey. "Don't do it." Then the poet's eyes grew wide and alarmed, as if he hadn't known he was going to say it.

Breaths sucked in around

them. Harvey's turret head slowly turned toward Madson, its expression seemingly vacuous. "Why not?" Harvey whispered.

"Don't pay any attention to my friend," Ellenby interjected rapidly. "He just said that on account of me. Actually he hates science as much as you do. Don't—"

"Shaddup!" Harvey roared. Then his voice instantly went low again. "Ain't nobody hates science more'n me, but ain't nobody tells me so. Shoulda kept your mouth shut, Skinny. Now there's gonna be more'n gadgets stomped, more'n books tore."

SILENCE CAME except for the faint sucks of breath, the faint scuffle of shoes on grit as Harvey's people slowly moved in. Ellenby stood helplessly, yet at the same time he felt a widening and intensification of his sensory powers. He was aware of the delicately lace-edged tree shadows cast from the hill ahead by the westering sun. At the other limit of his vision the copter no longer trailed its green caterpillar; for some reason it was buzzing closer along the road. At the same time he was conscious with a feverish clarity of the page by which Harvey dangled the Keats, and without reading the words he saw the lines:

*Beauty is truth, truth beauty—
that is all*

*Ye know on earth, and all ye
need to know.*

Suddenly the slowly advancing faces seemed to freeze and Ellenby was aware of something spectral and ominous about the yellowing sunlight and the whole acid-etched scene around him. It was something more than the physical threat to him and Madson—it was something that seemed to well up menacingly from the ground under his feet.

There was a sudden faint thunder and even as something inside Ellenby said, "That isn't it, that isn't what the sky's waiting for," he saw the chrome muzzle of the Lunar '69 bulleting toward them across the bridge with Vera-Allen's violet mop above the wheel.

But even as the braking blasts gouted out redly from under the hood and the car crunched toward a stop in their midst, even as Harvey's people broke to either side and pistols popped with queerly toylike reports, the thunder multiplied until it was impossible that the Lunar '69 was causing it, until it was like the thunder of a thousand invisible jets crushing the air around them. The sky shifted, rocked. The road shook. There came a shock that numbed Ellenby's feet and sent everyone around him reeling, and a

pounding, smashing sound that made any remembered noise seem puny.

The Lunar '69, which had stopped a dozen feet from Ellenby, was pitching and tossing like a silver ship in a storm. Vera-Allen was gripping the steering wheel with one hand and motioning to him frantically with the other. In the seat beyond her Rickie Vickson was jouncing as if in a merry-go-round chariot.

Ellenby lurched as a hand clutched his shoulder and a staggering Madson howled in his ear through the tumult, "Now you've got your rotten bombs!" Between him and the car Harvey's bullet head reared up and as suddenly dropped away. Looking down, Ellenby saw that a chasm four feet wide had split the road between him and the car. Its walls were raw, smoking earth and rock. Down it Ellenby saw vanishing, in one frozen moment, Harvey and the Keats and the little brass spectroscope.

Then Ellenby realized he had grabbed Madson by the shoulder and thrown the two of them forward and shouted "Jump!" For a moment the chasm gaped beneath them and a white little face stared upward. Then the chasm closed with a giant crunch and Ellenby's hand caught the side of the heaving car and he pitched into the back seat.

Through the diminishing thunder and shaking there came the toy roar of the car's jet and a new movement tipped him backward and he was looking toward the hill and it was getting bigger. He tried to put his feet down and felt something bulk under them. For a moment he thought it was Madson, but Madson was beside him on the seat, and then he saw it was George. He looked up and Rickie Vickson was watching him from where she was crouched in the front seat, her eyes without the teleglasses looking as foxy as Widgie's, whom she was holding close to her wrinkle-etched cheek.

"Vera-Ellen had to konk him," she explained, her gaze dipping to George. "The bum tried to betray us."

The pitching of the car had given way to a steady forward lunge. Ellenby nodded dully at Rickie and hitched himself around and looked back.

Harvey's people were scattering like ants through a dust cloud rising from the road.

The house on the hill still stood, though there were more and larger cracks in it and a nimbus of whiter dust around it.

By the bridge the copter had crashed and was flaming brightly. A tiny figure was running away from it.

ELLENBY'S face slowly lightened with understanding.

"We were on the San Andreas Rift," he said softly. "Madson, that wasn't the bombs at all. That wasn't Technology or Man." A smile trembled on his lips. "That was Nature. An earthquake."

Madson was the first to comment. "All right," he said, "it was Nature—Nature showing her disgust for Man."

"An idea like that is the sheerest animism," Ellenby reacted automatically. "Now if you try analyzing—"

"Analyzing!" Madson snorted with a touch of the old fire. "You scientists are always—"

"Whoa, boys," Rickie Vickson interrupted. "If it hadn't been for that little quake to confuse things, Vera-Ellen couldn't have snatched you out no matter how pretty she tried. And I'm in no mood for arguments now. I'm not the arty type and all the science I know is what my psychic counselor tells me. Widgie, quit pounding your heart; it's all over now."

Ellenby touched her arm. "Do I understand," he asked, "that Vera-Ellen made you turn back just to save us?"

"Of course not," Rickie assured him. "Her father and his pals tried to stop us a couple of miles back. They'd been radioed by a farmer in a copter and had

the road blocked. George wanted to hand you all over to Vera-Allen's father, but we conked George—he's such a weakling—and got away. Picking you up was an afterthought."

Vera-Allen flashed a wicked smile over her shoulder.

Ellenby realized he was feeling vastly contented. He started to lift his feet off George, then settled them more comfortably. He looked at the violet-topped new chauffeur handling the Lunar as if she'd never done anything else, and she picked that moment to flash him another half friendly, half insulting grin. He nudged Madson and said,

"We'll continue our argument later—*all* our argument." Madson looked at him sharply and almost grinned too. Ellenby wondered idly what jobs they had for poets and physicists in 3D and handie studios.

Rickie Vickson's eyes widened. "Say," she said, "if they were just warning us about that little old earthquake, then Old Angeles isn't radioactive—I mean any *more* radioactive than it's ever been."

"Oh boy," Vera-Allen crowed as the car topped the hill and the blue spires came back in sight, "New Angeles, here we come."

∞ ∞ ∞



"I paint what I see!"



by JOHN CHRISTOPHER

THE NOON'S REPOSE

To control genetics,

you must control love—

and if Cupid is human,

will he enjoy slavery?

Illustrated by ORBAN

KENNETH's face beamed at him.

"From your sleep, Henry—
arouse and brush your wings."

"A case? When?"

"This morning."

"Gender?"

"A woman."

"A voluntary?"

"Alas, no. But important. A triple star from Genetics. They demand our best. You are our best."

"A female, you said. A minus, I take it. As simple as that? No complications? What about the plus?"

"If it were as simple as that, Henry, would our best have been required? The focusing male plus is satisfactory. He had a strong valence for her from the time of introduction. But there is an intervening plus."

"Shall I have him as well?"

"I doubt it. He is unimportant. Except, of course, in relation to the woman. That valence was strong—abnormally strong."

Henry guessed. "The Elopement?"

Kenneth nodded. "So you follow the high romances of the telescreen? That's a human touch. Of course, there was no difficulty in finding her. A needle in the haystack of Calabria, but a magnetized needle.

She had a detector cell planted in her arm while under hypnosis, at the introduction."

"They had no chance at all, then."

"None."

"Does Genetics ever explain why? There are times when it would help, I feel. Suggestion works for the operator as well as the case, you know. It might improve efficiency."

"We know your efficiency, Henry. She will be brought up about ten. Breaking now."

He watched Kenneth's round smiling face splinter into rainbow fragments and dissolve before he switched his own screen off.

SHE STILL wore the clothes she had worn when he had seen her on the telescreen with her face tilted up towards the descending gyro in an expression of fear and hopelessness. That expression was replaced now by one of bitter anger. She turned to him as he stepped into the room, finding in him an object against which her hate could be directed. He looked back at her, feeling no pleasure. Pleasure would come later—in the building-up. But first there must be the breaking-down. There were some who enjoyed it; he had never realized that his own usefulness lay in the fact that he did not.

"You are Elaine," he said. "My name is Henry."

She watched him in complete silence.

"I am to help you in re-orientating." He paused, although hardly expecting a response. "I should like to make things easy for you." The quiet words, and the pause, and the quiet words again. "This process can be easy, though it can be very hard." She remained fixed; still mute, still implacable. "You know, Elaine, you will not leave here until we have succeeded—you and I, together."

She spoke then. "Do what you like. I can't stop you. But nothing with my consent—nothing."

He smiled. "And yet, I must have your consent. We are helpless without it. Of course, we could have you pre-frontalled. That would do if all we wanted was the acquiescence of your body. But we need much more than that."

"You won't get it."

"We will." He looked at her seriously, with brooding tenderness. "I have never had a failure."

"But you could have!"

"A theoretical possibility. Elaine. If you had escaped—what then?"

"Love. Only love."

"In hiding? Outlawed from society?"

"Society! The Cupids, and the toys of the Cupids."

"Happiness is not to be despised. Contentment is not to be despised. In another age . . ."

"We would have had our love!"

He nodded. "And murder, and famine, and disease, and war. Now you must take what is given. You must take safety and health and peace. You can have love, too, if you choose."

"I have chosen already."

"And chosen wrongly. I am to help you to choose again."

"Never with my consent."

She stood by the window, as far as possible from the robot-couch. They always did that, as though distance could help them. He glanced down at the panel of buttons under his hand, and saw her look follow his. He tended to cherish this last moment before force was wielded, but this time he knew how futile was the cherishing.

"Take off your clothes," he said gently. "Rest on the couch."

She shook her head. "No consent. No consent at all."

"You are not embarrassed—by my presence?"

She laughed, and all her bitterness was in the laughter. "By you? By a Cupid?"

"Then do as I ask." She stared at him in refusal. He said compassionately: "Understand, whatever must be done is done

for two ends—for society and for you. They are not separate ends. Nothing can separate them." He pressed the third button. "Nothing."

She cried out once as the gliding rubber arms sought for her and found her, pulling her back to the airfoam couch. After that she struggled in silence as the delicately probing metal fingers did their work, sparing flesh, tearing and dissolving fabric. When they had finished, he came and stood beside her.

"That is the first lesson," he told her. "That physically you are in our power."

She looked up at him. "It was unnecessary. I knew it."

"No." He shook his head slowly. "You only thought that you knew it."

"CONSENT."

"No!"

"There is no point in resisting."

"No!"

"The happiness that you thought you wanted was an illusion. It is gone. It can never exist again, in that shape. Do you believe me?"

"I don't care."

"You will care."

IN HER DREAM she walked by the Adriatic. Peter walked beside her, his hand under the crook of her elbow. Late in an

autumn afternoon, the east wind scoured the waters of the bay and reached them damp and chill. She shivered.

Peter said: "Have my tunic?"

"No. It wasn't cold. Fear, I think."

"I know. But we shouldn't be afraid. Fear is only for people who have something to lose."

"We have this."

"Already lost. We have hours, perhaps. Days, I hope. A week at the outside. But in fact no more than from one moment to the next."

"It's so unfair."

He smiled. "Yes. Unfair that we should have these moments, this instant—we, and in the whole world no others."

Henry said: "Cut now, to the gyro."

Sliding down out of the sky, an arrow streaked with careless precision at the small seaside hollow where they stood. She looked up at it, in fear, in despair. In isolation.

"HE IS a good man," Henry said. "He loves you."

"What you mean by love?"

He consulted the file. "George Hutchinson. Twenty-seven, physical grade A, intelligence 120, 175, 115, averaging 137. You match. You will be proud of your children."

"No!"

"You will."

HE WATCHED her dreams again, suggesting, guiding, selecting from her mind the memories that he needed. Suggesting and watching, and then switching back to the moment he had recognized as vital. In this he counterpointed truth, actuality, to a false harmony. A falseness that was essential. He knew that it was essential; but there was no joy in it.

THE SEA glistened far below them, and then he pointed out the brown smudge of land. He touched the controls and they began to glide down, down to the unreal waiting world below them.

"There?" she asked.

"Yes. A wild country. Not worth harvesting—no one lives there. I believe the wolves have come back."

"Perhaps they will suckle us."

"Perhaps. It is the wildest territory within the range of our batteries. I suppose it makes no difference."

"They will find us?"

"Of course. A simple elimination."

"They might not think it worthwhile." She saw him smile. "But why? What importance are we to them?"

"You know. The most important thing there is."

"Then we have won. We have won, really."

"Of course we have."

He made a landing on the bald crest of a little hill, less than a mile from the water's edge. The air had a morning freshness, and there was the smell of the sea. She stretched her cramped legs while he adjusted the automatic controls. Then he stood beside her, and together they watched the empty gyro lift into the arc of blue.

"Go in peace," Peter said.

They saw the little dot crumple into the sea and the waves fold over it. The land was empty all round them.

"Back," Henry said. "*Focus point.*"

Now that it was really coming, dropping in a typical parabolic landing towards them, she would not believe it. Or, believing it, she almost believed also that by an act of will sufficiently great he could wipe the blue sky clean. It was a small thing that destroyed the belief, negated the act of will: the sight of the television cameras projecting from the undercarriage. The whole world had found them.

"WHAT do you hope for?"

She bit her lip. "Nothing."

"Do you know what a murderer is?"

"They killed people. Of course I know."

"No longer. They do not exist now. Is that good?"

"Peter and I were not murderers."

"If you had been—potentially—would society have been justified in re-orienting you?"

"I suppose so."

"Do you hate society?"

"Yes."

"Hatred is murder unrealized. Do you agree?" Silence. "Do you agree?"

SHE DREAMED again. The door of Peter's office closed behind her; he came towards her and they kissed beneath the wall chart where the great strato-liners were tiny winking lights.

He spoke into her hair. "Well, did you meet your husband?"

"That's not a good joke."

He disengaged and looked at her. "Any joke is a good one now. What is he like?"

"Amiable. I loathe him."

Peter shook his head. "Fortunate George Hutchinson."

"No! It shan't happen."

"How did it go? I've never had an introduction. I don't rate with the genetic elite, you know."

"I shan't let you be bitter with me." She kissed him again. "The introduction? It was nothing. A hypno-test, and then being confronted with him, and the usual business with tapes. It was over inside an hour."

"What reaction did you give?"

"Neutral—as you told me. That was right?"

"Yes. But it makes no difference. Did they make any arrangements?"

"I am to go to a Cupid, as a voluntary."

"When?"

She shivered. "Starting tomorrow. I tried to suggest a delay, but it was no good. Peter! What do we do?"

"We leave today."

"Can we? Are you ready?"

"The gyro's on the roof. I took the detectors out of it this morning. Put in a couple of sleeping bags. Some food—as much as we will need."

"Where will we go?"

"Does it matter?"

"No. Now?"

"Now."

"Focus point," Henry said.

Up to that very instant she had believed: we have nothing to lose, we have lost everything already. "Think of it as death," Peter had said. "Death is welcome when the sentence cannot be altered—postponement does not help." But she saw now that it was not death that claimed them. It was something that was far worse than death. It was life.

"Do you believe that I seek your good?"

"As you see it."

"Would you say that a human

creature automatically knows its own true welfare?"

She hesitated. "No. But . . ."

"Well?"

"In the country of the blind . . ."

"The rest of the world is blind?"

"Yes!"

Henry smiled. "The Cupids—and the toys of the Cupids?"

"Yes."

"But even the Cupids are well-meaning—you admit that?"

"They are wrong."

"But seeking man's good—your good—as they see it?"

"Yes." Wearily: "I suppose so."

THEY WERE to meet for lunch at the pool. It was the usual thing for Peter to go ahead and get a table. She slipped into a booth and foamed on a plastic suit; then she walked across the springy camomile lawns to the water's edge. The sky was cloudy and the whole range of sunlets glittered from their silver wires overhead.

She dived deep and came up half a minute later within the rock-crystal confines of the grotto. Peter smiled to her from a table in the corner. She walked through the dryer to join him.

He said: "I've known you forever, and yet I didn't know how lovely you would be in that shade of blue. How strange."

"Peter! I had a summons this morning."

He recognized her tension. "Well?"

"To an introduction."

"When?"

"Early next week. Tuesday."

He smiled crookedly. She saw that it was a characteristic expression, indicating a particular reaction. A mannerism, among hundreds probably, that she might have come to know—to love or to resent. Even to resent, she thought, would be enough. That would at least be knowing him.

"So we aren't ordinary any more," Peter said. "Somehow I suspected we weren't going to be."

"I never dreamt. . . . I knew that I was in the year for it, but so few people are called to introductions."

"Approximately one in fifteen. The elite. The fathers and mothers of *homo superior* . . ."

"No! Please. . . . What are we going to do?"

He looked at her. "I love you."

"You know . . ."

"You may be rejected in the full test."

"Do you think I will be?"

"No."

"Then?"

"Then we shall have to be special, since we aren't allowed to be ordinary."

"Focus point."

A mad whim: to defy, to struggle, to curse the pursuers and with them all the others who stood or sat or lay watching her agony transfixed on plastic screens. Watching it while they lived their ordinary lives—eating, perhaps, drinking or making love.

She looked at Peter, as the gyro settled. He was gazing calmly into the sky. It was as though he were at peace.

"As CUPIDS, we make sacrifices."

She laughed, some bitterness returning. "Everyone knows that. I suppose power makes up for it."

"Not what you are thinking about. Never having known desire, it is no sacrifice to miss it. Other things."

"What?"

"Companionship. Children. Especially children."

"Do you have those needs?"

"Suggestion can control the physical reactions, but not the spiritual ones."

"And yet—you are trying to change my love."

"Change, not suppress. You will love and be loved, and you will have children."

"No."

"Yes. You are destined to be a whole creature, and a happy one."

THEY MET, prosaically, at a party given by friends, but the following evening he took her to a half-gravity ball, and they danced together, uninterruptedly, for nearly three hours. It was nearly all waltzes, so recently come back into fashion; at low gravity the turns were both spectacular and exhilarating. They went out into the garden then, staggering a little at first under the shock of the return to normal gravity, and laughing at each other.

Under a luminous-leaved magnolia, Peter said:

"Yesterday I didn't know you."

She shook her head, and he kissed her.

"I would like to be ordinary," he said. "Do all the ordinary things—courtship and marriage and children, and living more or less happily ever after. What do you think of it?"

"Can't we be just a little out of the ordinary?"

"I'd rather not. All the real magic is in being ordinary."

"I wish I could believe that."

"You will do, someday. Do you want to go back in yet?"

"No."

"*Focus point!*"

His calmness was such a strange thing, almost a welcoming of the end that was falling towards them out of the bright blue: the squat ugly gyro with

the embossed badge of Genetics Division underneath. A calmness. . . .

HENRY's thought, concentrated, benevolent, assured: "Not calmness—indifference. Essentially he was always indifferent. The rest was an illusion; a convincing illusion, but still an illusion. Here it is stripped and bare—in this moment, this instant of crisis, he had nothing for you when you turned to him. Nothing. It died then, and you know it died."

. . . AND her mind turned, as though she were watching one of those trick perspectives of squares and had suddenly seen it from a different angle, to the awareness that she could never be certain of how things had really been. It was a matter of viewpoint.

HENRY was sweating. He snapped his fingers.

"Wake!"

He spoke a few words into the panel in front of him as she began to sit up. The door opened, and Peter came in.

"Peter!" she said wonderingly.

Peter looked at her politely.

"He doesn't know you," Henry said. "It was possible to use more direct methods. A prefrontal and some straightforward suggestions. He doesn't

know you and, although I must say this for him, he doesn't wish to. We must be frank, Peter, for this lady's sake. Tell her one thing: you are happy?"

"Happy?" Peter asked. "Of course."

"Thank you. You may go now."

He turned to leave the room. She spoke after him:

"Goodbye. Goodbye, my dearest."

"I FAILED?" Henry said.

She nodded. "There has to be a first time."

"Tell me—it was not a failure in intention? You accepted the fact of my good will?"

"Yes."

"Then what? The focus point was well chosen—the rest went smoothly."

She smiled. After a pause, she said: "I'm ready now."

"Ready?"

"I consent."

"Consent? But why?"

She looked at the door

through which Peter had gone.

"I would not choose a different death."

KENNETH said: "Congratulations! Another notch in your little bow."

"They're pleased?"

"Expressly delighted. You're invited to the wedding."

"I've already been invited, by the bride."

"What a talent—to bring happiness out of confusion."

"And Peter?"

"Peter? The other male? Well adjusted. He will be marrying soon. We have a sense of responsibility, after all."

"Yes. We have. Kenneth?"

"Yes?"

"I should like a holiday?"

"Of course. Missing the wedding?"

"Missing the wedding."

Kenneth shook his head. "Curious. I always thought that Cupid loved his victims."

"Only before he's killed them."

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FANFARE—INFINITY's fanzine reprint department—was crowded out of this issue, but will continue to appear whenever we can find an item in the amateur science-fiction press that we think will interest the majority of our readers. If you have a candidate for this department, call it to our attention. We'll pay \$5.00 to the person who first suggests an item that we can use, so send us a copy of your favorite fan story, article, or what-have-you—today!

Shaan made the longest crawl in history

—to avoid crawling before tyrants!

The Martian Shore

by CHARLES L. FONTENAY



THE LONE figure trudged across the Hellas Desert toward Alpheus Canal. He moved fast in the low gravity of Mars, but the canal was miles away and the afternoon was far gone.

Robbo Shaan turned his marsuit temperature unit down a degree. He still perspired freely, but he didn't dare turn it any lower. Only a green Earthand would ignore any survival factor

when stranded on the Martian desert.

Shaan had no map, no compass. But he remembered there was a private dome in the middle of the canal, just about due east from him. He didn't have enough oxygen to reach it. They had seen to that. But he'd try till he died.

The brand itched on his forehead, and scalded in the sweat

Illustrated by EMSH



that poured down from his close-cropped blond hair. With his marshelmet on, there was no way to scratch it. It throbbed.

Even if he reached the dome, or any dome, that brand guaranteed that he would be shot on sight.

Soldiers of the Imperial Government of Mars had dropped the jetcopter to the sand hours before, and turned Robbo Shaan out to die. He had stood on the red sand and watched the 'copter with the four-winged eagles painted on its sides, as it rose and fled away from him in the direction of Mars City.

He smiled grimly. The Imperial Constitution did not permit the Government to kill a man outright, no matter what his crime. This was the way they did it instead.

Robbo Shaan's crime was simple. He believed in the old democratic form of government the Martian dome-cities had had after the Martian people won their freedom from the Earth corporations in the Charax Uprising—and had recently lost. Shaan had talked democracy, and under the new Imperial Government that was treason.

There was no appeal from his sentence. If he lived—and how could he live without food or oxygen?—he was an outcast. It was a peculiar legal contradiction; the government was pro-

hibited from executing him outright, but, once he had been branded, it was the duty of every loyal citizen to shoot him dead on sight.

Shaan checked his oxygen dial. There was only about an hour's supply left. He couldn't cut his use of it down.

Instinctively, his hand dropped to his belt, but the vial of suspensene he'd carried so long was not there. They wouldn't leave him that. Suspensene was a drug that would put a man in suspended animation for twenty-four hours. It was used in such emergencies when oxygen ran low, to preserve life until rescue came.

What good would it have done him, anyhow? There would be no rescue for him. The radio equipment had been removed from his marshelmet. Even if it hadn't, no one would help a branded man.

HE SAW the green expanse of the canal when he was still far away from it. It was a thin line that broadened as he approached, panting, getting the best he could from his weary legs with long, floating leaps.

He reached the edge of the cliff. The canal was a hundred feet below him, too far to jump, even on Mars. He walked a mile southward along the rim, seeking a downward ledge.

There was no ledge. But Shaan found a roughness of projecting rocks, where the cliff was not entirely perpendicular. He scrambled down.

He jumped down the last twenty feet. He landed with a muffled crunch of broken branches in the canal sage that stretched in unbroken gray-green expanse from the base of the cliff, as far as the eye could see.

He got to his feet. The canal sage was uniformly knee-high. It was so close-packed that the tops formed an apparently solid carpet on the canal bottom.

He checked his oxygen dial. Only fifteen minutes' supply left. Even if he were on course, the private dome was at least twenty miles away.

He was in the shadow of the cliff here. The small sun of Mars was low in the west. Above him, the brightest stars already shone in the dark blue sky.

The cold of night was beginning to descend. There was frost on the leaves of the canal sage. He switched his marsuit temperature control from "cool" to "heat," but left it low. His body temperature would keep him warm enough as long as he was moving.

Fifteen minutes and then death. Shaan shrugged. He started walking, straight away from the cliff toward the distant

sunlight that still touched the canal sage to the east.

His passage through the plants left a path behind him, a path that slowly closed again as though the canal sage moved deliberately to heal the break.

His only hope in that fifteen minutes was to find a giant canal cactus. All Martian plants, the botanists had decided, kept their oxygen supply in their hollow interiors. A full-grown canal cactus was forty feet tall and twenty feet across. If he could break his way into one, it was big enough to supply him with both oxygen and water.

But there was no canal cactus in sight, and he could have seen one miles away above this flat expanse of knee-high sage.

He moved along stubbornly, the canal sage dragging at his feet. He watched the needle of the oxygen dial sink slowly toward the "empty" mark.

The needle hit zero. Shaan stopped. He shook the perspiration from his eyes and looked around him, straining for distance.

No friendly cactus reared anywhere above the gray-green sea of sage. No flash of sunlight revealed a distant dome. There was only the frost-rimed expanse of leaves stretching away, the dark cliff rising behind him and the cold, star-studded sky overhead.

Shaan felt that he was suffocating. Was the residue of oxygen in his marsuit really depleting that fast, or was it the frantic rebellion of his mind against inevitable death?

A great anger swept over him, and with it a bitter defiance. He fumbled at the winged nuts that locked his marshelmet in place. He loosened them, freed them, and dropped them in his pocket.

With a wrench, he unsealed the helmet and lifted it from his head. He lifted his naked face to the thin air of Mars.

Dizziness swept over him and, with it, nausea. The stars spun in the blue-black sky, and went out for him.

He toppled forward, the useless helmet falling from his hands. His unconscious body crashed through the frosty foliage of the canal sage to the turf beneath.

SHAAN opened his eyes. At once, he was amazed. He had not expected to open them again, ever. It was impossible that he should.

He was cold. The cold of death? No. He wouldn't be feeling that.

He was in utter blackness, with a fragrant, woody aroma in his nostrils. He was lying flat on his stomach, on a surface that was not soft, but springy.

Had he been rescued? Was he in a hospital somewhere? In a dome?

He moved his fingers. They clutched chill, moldy sod.

But he was breathing. The air was sweet and keen, like the air of a terrestrial mountain top. He was alive.

He pulled his knees under him slowly and sat up. His bare head struck a flimsy, rustling barrier and thrust through. The air rushed from his lungs and he gasped in the thin, icy-cold Martian air. He had a single glimpse of jewelled stars in a velvet sky before he threw himself prone beneath the foliage again.

He lay there, recovering his breath. Slowly, realization came to him.

He was under the canopy formed by the foliage of myriads of canal sage plants. The leaves formed a tightly packed roof 18 inches above the ground. Perhaps the plants did store oxygen in their hollow stems. But they trapped it beneath the solid cover of their foliage, too, forming a thin layer of breathable atmosphere along the surface of the canal.

Shaan laughed, a harsh, dry laugh. For years people had been crunching around through the canal sage, harvesting it sometimes for fuel and other purposes. All that time they had not realized they were wading

through a layer of breathable oxygen at their very ankles.

The foliage trapped the daytime heat, too. That was why Shaan was only cold, instead of nearly frozen.

Carefully, he got to hands and knees and began to crawl. At once, he ran into a tangle of plant stems. He could make no headway. He subsided and lay down again, thinking it over.

He was hungry and thirsty. Canal sage was better cooked, but it was edible raw. All he had to do was reach out his hands and cram the thick leaves in his mouth, being careful not to denude too much of the canopy above him.

After a while, he was well fed. The leaves had partially assuaged his thirst, too.

As long as he stayed below the canal sage foliage, he could live. He had air, food and water. The roof of plants kept out the night cold. But he could not get to his feet. If he wanted to reach the dome, he would have to crawl twenty miles on hands and knees, without the sun and stars to guide him through the tangled stems.

At least he was alive. That was more than he had expected. He went to sleep.

When he awoke, he was lying on his back and the canal sage foliage was a sheet of golden green above his face. It

was daytime. No shaft of sunlight broke through the leaves, but they were a pulsing foam of translucence.

The sun itself was a brighter spot in the roof of light.

The stems of the canal sage plants were not nearly as close together as they had seemed in the darkness. Most of them were at least a foot and a half apart. There were no leaves on the plants below their bushy, flattened tops, and the ground below them was a springy mattress of decaying leaves and twigs. He could move through it, though it would be hard on his hands and knees.

The sun would show him his directions, if he knew what time it was. He had no watch—they didn't waste expensive items like that on men condemned to die in the desert. He thrust his head momentarily above the foliage and located the cliffs in the west. It was morning, apparently about 0800.

He had some difficulty rigging a harness, but at last he managed to attach the marshelmet to his belt. He might need it again.

He ate again and began crawling eastward. The plant stems were not hard to thrust aside with his shoulders when they could be seen.

But crawling was a lot harder than walking. After a while he

realized that his marsuit heating unit was still on. He turned it off. He wouldn't need it again until—or unless—he reached a dome.

TWENTY miles is a long way to crawl, even on Mars. At the end of two days, he had not found the dome he sought, and his palms and knees were raw.

He had learned to push his head into the foliage so he could still breathe a little, for a short time, and thrust his eyes above the canal sage to survey the terrain around him. He did this periodically, but there was no dome to be seen.

As the shadow of the distant cliff, now dim in the blue haze, crept across the canal sage toward him on the second day of his odyssey, he saw the rounded top of a canal cactus reared above the sage. It was about two miles away. He ducked beneath the leaves and crawled.

When darkness caught him, he forced himself to interrupt his quest. Trying to crawl at night, with nothing to indicate direction, might just take him farther from his objective.

Early the next morning, he reached the base of the cactus, a solid wall of olive green across the limited horizon of his nether world.

He had no knife, nothing at all with a cutting edge. He

didn't want to break his mars-helmet, even if he could. He began to crawl around the foot of the giant plant, almost hopelessly seeking an opening.

Surprisingly, he found one, but it was small. It was about eight inches in diameter, and it looked as though it had been gnawed.

Shaan propped his chin on his hands and considered. During the two days he had moved beneath the canal sage foliage, he had seen no sign of animal life.

Except for the Martian natives, intelligent creatures who did not breathe but assimilated oxygen from plants and soil and stored it compressed in their tissues, no animal life had been found on Mars. The Martians, with bodies of almost human size, walked on long, stilt-like legs and were strict vegetarians. Reports by occasional canal settlers that they had found traces of animal life—without seeing the animals—were discounted.

But this hole in the canal cactus looked like it had been made by an animal.

The stems of the canal sage were not large, but they were stiff and woody. Shaan found a dead stalk lying on the ground, broke it to a jagged point and started to work on the edges of the hole.

It took him most of the day, but near nightfall he had enlarged the opening until it would admit him. He crawled into the hollow cactus.

It was darker inside than outside, but not completely dark. He was in a giant, ovoid room lit by a dim green twilight.

It was good to stand up straight again, even though the floor curved downward from his entranceway. The occasional drip of water sounded in his ears. Moving forward slowly, he was able to distinguish a small, shallow pool in the low center of the cactus' hull. Since the shell of the big plant curved downward from the entrance, the pool must have been several feet below ground level.

Shaan had not tasted free water since he had emptied his canteen on the desert and thrown it away four days before. He dropped to his knees, unmindful of their rawness, and drank greedily. The water was fresh and cool, with some of the taste of the cactus plant in it.

It grew dark fast. As Shaan lay relaxed on the floor of his new haven, he heard a scurrying and a squeaking in the darkness. Then there came a muted splashing near him.

Shaan held his breath. He had no idea of the size or capabilities of the creatures which had joined him in the cactus. But if

they were aware of his presence they had no fear of him. Nor did they molest him.

He saw them for a few moments early the next morning. They were furry, squirrel-like creatures without tails, that ran on their two hind legs and held hand-like paws against their chests. They stared at him with big bright eyes, about half a dozen of them, before they ran out through the hole he had enlarged.

Living in the cactus was more satisfactory than living outside. Shaan made it his headquarters. He slept in it at night, amid the furry animals, which accepted his presence without question, merely avoiding any close approach.

By day, he crawled out in search of the dome. He did it systematically, going in a different direction each day. He tried sixteen directions without success.

A day just wasn't long enough. The second two-day trip he made, going out one day, sleeping out and returning the second day, he saw the sun flash off a faraway plastic dome at midafternoon.

SHAAN pushed his face through the leaves and stared across a hundred-foot cleared space at the dome. The canal sage was very efficient. When

the space had been cleared for the dome, the sage foliage had grown down to the ground level around the bare circle to prevent the life-giving oxygen under it from dissipating.

The transparent hemisphere glistened dully in the sunlight. It covered about an acre of ground. Near one side was the small home of a canal settler. Under the protective dome terrestrial vegetables grew and terrestrial animals lived.

Long ago Shaan had jettisoned his oxygen cylinders to save weight, but they would have done him no good had he kept them. His marshelmet, however, would hold enough air for him to cross the cleared area to the dome. He pulled it on, under the leaves.

Then he remembered something and took it off again. He smeared dirt over the brand on his forehead, hoping he was concealing it. He put the helmet back on.

Getting to his feet, he ran across the clearing and through the open outer door of the airlock. He shut it behind him and, waiting a few minutes, took off the helmet. There was air in the airlock.

He had done this without fear or reflection. On a planet like Mars, only a thin line of oxygen stood between life and death. The outer door to every

airlock on every dome stood open unless the inner door was opened, and oxygen automatically filled the airlock when the outer door was closed. It was a custom which could save lives.

The inner airlock door was a different proposition. No one liked to be caught unawares by visitors. It was locked.

Shaan knew the closing of the outer airlock door had set off an alarm inside the dome. He waited. He could see the house and the gardens, a little distorted, through the transparent plastic of the inner door.

After a few moments, a figure emerged from the house and approached the airlock. When the figure got closer, it became a young woman in the shorts and blouse customarily worn inside the domes. She held a heat-gun in her hand.

"Who is it?" she asked through the communicator.

"I'm Robbo Shaan," he answered. "I'm a government mail pilot. My plane went down on the desert."

"Why didn't you wait for rescue?"

"Radio went out before I crashed. Helmet radio, too. I'll have to call for help from here."

"You can wait in the airlock. I'll radio Mars City."

"I'm hungry," he said, "and thirsty."

That was an appeal that could

not be ignored.

"I'll let you in," she said after a moment's hesitation.

"But I have a gun."

"I don't," he answered, spreading his hands and turning so she could see all around his belt.

The inner airlock door opened, and Shaan entered the dome. The smell of the air brought memories of his boyhood on Earth.

The girl stood away from him, holding the heat-gun on him steadily. She had brown eyes and red-gold hair that tumbled to her shoulders. Shaan judged her to be about seventeen years old.

Shaan smiled at her through his blond beard, and she lowered the muzzle of the gun. He could move now, but they probably were being watched from the house. And any minute she might discover the brand on his dirty face.

"Where's your father?" he asked. "Or your husband?"

"Where are your oxygen tanks?" she countered, the gun coming up again.

"Ran out of oxygen," he replied. "They're in the sage just outside the dome. I got here just in time. The straps broke on them and I'd been carrying them in my arms for six hours."

Apparently the answer satisfied her.

"I'm Lori MkDowl," she

said. "My father hasn't come in from the mine yet. Come on up to the house."

Now? No. They probably were still being watched from the house. He walked across the lawn of Earth grass with her.

IT WAS a small plastic-brick house like any Martian house. As they entered the parlor, a long-legged girl of about fifteen left an open front window, a heat-gun dangling in her hand.

"Is he harmless, Lori?" she asked.

"I think so," said Lori. "Mr. Shaan, this is my sister, Vali."

Vali MkDowl laid her heat-gun on a table and held out a hand to Shaan in frank welcome. Her hair was black and her deep blue eyes held more curiosity and less reserve than those of her sister.

Lori had laid her gun aside, too. His task would be made easier, Shaan thought, by the fact that these teen-aged sisters probably didn't see a young man oftener than once a year and were lonesome.

"I'd like to talk to your mother, girls," said Shaan, more to confirm a suspicion than anything else.

"Mother's dead," said Vali. "We live here alone with father."

"But we can take care of ourselves, Mr. Shaan," warned Lori,

her hand near her gun.

"I'm sure you can. Do you mind if I clean up a little?"

"Bathroom's across the hall," said Lori. "I'll fix supper."

The marsuits were hanging in the hall: Lori's, Vali's and an extra one that looked like it was big enough for Shaan. He stripped off his own worn and dirty one, emerging in brown coveralls, and went into the bathroom.

While he washed, his nebulous plan of action crystalized. First he must gain possession of the heat-guns in the house and cripple the dome radio. It would be dangerous, maintaining constant watch over three hostile people, but he could live here indefinitely while evolving a permanent plan of existence.

He found gauze and adhesive tape in the bathroom cabinet and put a bandage over the flaming brand on his forehead. He walked out into the parlor.

"I called Mars City and told them to send a rescue 'copter," said Vali, gesturing toward the radio in the corner. "Say, what happened to your head?"

"Banged it on the corner of the cabinet," said Shaan. "What did Mars City say?"

"Haven't got a reply yet. Should hear from them in a minute."

He hadn't expected the radio message to be sent until the

girls' father arrived. This changed his plans. Now he'd have to appropriate a marsuit and supplies and flee in the dome's groundcar. What then, he didn't know. There could be no refuge for condemned democrats anywhere on Mars.

Vali's gun was strapped to her side now. Lori evidently had taken her own weapon into the kitchen with her. Lori was taking no chances, and not letting her sister take any.

"I left my watch in the bathroom," said Shaan and went back into the hall. Quickly, he appropriated the hypodermics of suspensene from the pockets of two of the marsuits, and stepped back into the parlor.

"Here comes Mars City now," said Vali, donning the ear-phones.

He stepped up behind her as she turned to fiddle with the dials. His left hand clasped over her mouth, while with his right he plunged the needle into the fleshy part of her upper arm. Dropping the empty hypodermic vial, he caught her wrist as she reached for her gun.

In a moment, Vali went limp. She would remain in suspended animation for approximately twenty-four hours.

The other hypodermic syringe in his hand, Shaan moved through the dining room toward the kitchen.

"Has father come in yet, Vali?" called Lori.

"She's still talking to Mars City," said Shaan, entering the kitchen.

Lori was standing at the stove, her back to him. He reached her in a single floating stride. Her shorts-clad rump presented the best target, and he jabbed the needle into it.

She straightened with a yelp, and he snatched the heat-gun from her holster at the same time. Whirling on him, she grappled with him, but he held the gun above his head, out of her reach, until she collapsed in his arms.

He laid the heat-guns together on the radio table and carried the girls into a bedroom across the hall. He stretched the still figures side by side on a bed and pulled a sheet up to their chins.

He would have to ambush their father and get the ground-car. He stepped back into the hall, closing the door behind him.

"You're covered with a heat-gun, Robbo Shaan," said a man's voice from the front door.

THE red-headed man, still in his marsuit but unhelmeted, stood just inside the front door pointing the gun at Shaan. There was death in his eyes.

"I suppose you're MkDowl,"

said Shaan carefully. It had to be. Of course, MkDowl's mars-helmet radio would have been tuned to the dome channel and he'd have heard what Mars City was telling Vali.

"What have you done to my girls?" demanded MkDowl ominously. "Tell me, before I kill you."

"I've been trying to help them," said Shaan calmly. "I believe it's something they ate for lunch, just before I got here. They're pretty sick. I put them to bed."

Alarm appeared on MkDowl's face. Turning his back on the man, Shaan went back into the bedroom. Gun in hand, MkDowl followed him hastily.

"Lori! Vali!" cried MkDowl at the sight of his unconscious daughters. Anxiously, he brushed past Shaan.

Shaan hit him behind the head with the edge of his palm as he passed. MkDowl pitched forward, and Shaan leaped to catch the gun that arced from his hand. When MkDowl sat up, dazed, a moment later, Shaan had him covered.

"Your girls are under suspense," said Shaan. "I'm not going to hurt any of you. I just want a marsuit and your ground-car."

He motioned with the heat-gun and followed MkDowl out of the bedroom. Shaan approp-

riated the two guns from the radio table, then made MkDowl stand by the living room window, in his line of sight from the marsuit racks in the hall.

"You'll never get away, you damn traitor," snapped MkDowl.

"I can make a good try," retorted Shaan pleasantly. He checked the supplies of the largest marsuit with one hand, holding the gun on MkDowl with the other. "A groundcar can't outrun planes, but I think I can make the cactus forests of the Hadriacum Lowlands before they spot me. They won't find me there."

"You'll never get out of this dome. I can find a way to stop you before you can get that groundcar through the airlock."

"We'll see," said Shaan, turning from the rack with the hypo from the third marsuit. "Why are you so bitter against a man you don't know?"

"You're a traitor," said MkDowl defiantly.

"I just said I believe in a democratic form of government. It hasn't been long since we were all democrats on Mars."

"The democratic government was corrupt. You won't find many friends."

Shaan knew that was true—both statements. There was no longer any organized democratic movement on Mars. He

was completely alone. There was no place for him to go anywhere.

He moved toward MkDowl, with the hypo in his hand. MkDowl watched him closely, not moving. It was when Shaan shifted the gun to his left hand and the hypo to his right that MkDowl moved.

Shaan had been prepared for a desperate attack. But MkDowl leaped head-first out the window, in a single swift motion.

Shaan went after him. MkDowl disappeared around the corner of the house as Shaan jumped through the window.

Shaan regretted it, but he would have to blast MkDowl. Even if he could get away, MkDowl would tell the soldiers which way he had gone.

As Shaan turned the corner of the house, MkDowl was climbing into the groundcar. Shaan let go with the heat beam, but the groundcar's metal and windshield were strong enough to resist it at that distance. MkDowl's head disappeared beneath the dashboard.

With a sputter of smoke, the groundcar's engine started. MkDowl had to have the engine running for power to use the groundcar's swivel-mounted heat-gun. Shaan saw the muzzle of the weapon begin to swing slowly toward him.

As MkDowl's head came in view in the windshield to aim, Shaan's own beam penetrated the glass at full power. Hair aflame, MkDowl slumped forward over the wheel.

MkDowl's body evidently hit the forward drive lever, for the groundcar suddenly plunged toward Shaan, wheels spinning. Shaan ducked behind the house and ran for the front door.

As Shaan reached the door, the groundcar caromed off the edge of the house. Without slackening speed, it plunged across the yard and plowed through the side of the dome near the airlock. The plastic hemisphere began to collapse with a whistle of escaping air.

In desperate haste, Shaan got into the marsuit in the hall. He switched on its oxygen supply. He opened a cabinet beside the marsuit rack and got a map of Mars, shoving it into a breast pocket of the suit.

Shaan started for the front door. Then he stopped.

COULD he depend on the soldiers finding the two girls when they arrived? Could he even know for sure that soldiers were coming? Mars City might have instructed Vali just to shoot him down. If the girls awoke from suspended animation in the thin Martian air, their simulated death would become real.

Shaan went back into the bedroom. He took Lori under one arm, Vali under the other. They were easy to carry in Martian gravity.

The plastic of the dome had settled, clinging. He had to burn his way through the diaphragm of it that barred the door.

Carrying the girls, he walked across the wrinkled plastic to the ground. Half a mile away, the groundcar had overturned in the canal sage. Fed by the oxygen from beneath the plants, it was burning slowly.

Shaan laid the girls on the ground in the cleared area around what was left of the dome. They could be seen easily here by anyone approaching by air.

What next? He pulled the map from his pocket and opened it.

It was easy to see why he had remembered MkDowl Dome would be here. It was the only dome in Alpheus Canal. There were no others anywhere within walking distance—or in crawling distance, when his oxygen supply failed. There was Charax, about 1,800 miles southeast. Mars City was about the same distance north, and Hesperidum about the same distance north-east.

The nearest dome of any kind was a private dome, Kling's Dome, on Pencus Canal at

least 250 miles away.

He had been just as well off before he ever came to MkDowl's Dome. But now MkDowl was dead and his two daughters were homeless.

His marshelmet radio buzzed.

"MkDowl Dome, we're nearing you," said a faint voice. "Should land in half an hour. Light beacon and give us a radio beam."

The radio antenna and the beacon had gone down with the dome. Without these, would the government 'copters ever find MkDowl's Dome in the night?

The sun dropped behind the far cliffs and the red twilight of Mars deepened suddenly into darkness. Shaan was safe from discovery for the night now, but the girls might not be rescued in time.

He picked them up from the ground and started off in the general direction of the cactus that had been his temporary home before. He plodded through the canal sage, the girls a dead weight under his arms.

Twice the government 'copters plaintively demanded directional help. After the second time, he switched off the helmet radio.

He was doomed to death if he were discovered. Nowhere on Mars did he have a friend. Even the unconscious girls he carried would hate him now.

And what was to become of them? MkDowl's Dome would not be rebuilt by another tenant. If he gave up his marsuit to one of them, that would be only one, and the marsuit radio would not reach Kling's Dome. At least one, probably both, were stranded with him.

Not for them would he give up his own life to stay near MkDowl's Dome and call the 'copters in.

SHAAN was a democrat and by virtue of that was engaged in a war without quarter against almost everyone else on Mars. He was a lone relic of a defeated army, and he had been driven to the wall. He could surrender to death, or he could fight for survival.

Many men before him, and many living creatures before man appeared on Earth, had faced that situation in one form or another, he thought. Some had succumbed. Others had lived.

The ancestors of man himself had faced it and lived, when they were driven by voracious creatures of the sea into the shallows and at last to the inhospitable land. Now he was driven to a shore more inhospitable than any on Earth, oxygen-poor, water-poor: the Martian shore.

Many years ago his ancestors had learned to crawl instead of

swim. He and his descendants—the descendants of Lori and Vali—could learn to crawl instead of walk. Those who crawled could survive and evolve, without domes, without marshsuits, without any man-made equipment.

He reached the base of a giant cactus. He was sure it was not the one he had inhabited before, but now he had a knife.

In the distant night sky, he heard the drone of 'copter motors.

Shaan laid the girls down at his feet and dropped prone at the foot of the cactus. When the leaves of the canal sage had closed slowly above them, he took off his marshelmet.

"Man is man because he thinks, not because he walks erect," Shaan murmured to the unconscious girls. "Would your fate be better if you birthed children who had to live in a plastic dome?"

Shaan was a democrat. Rightly or wrongly, he was convinced that the Imperial Government bore within it the seeds of dissatisfaction and strife, eventually a war of rebellion that would crumble the domes and leave all the people of Mars to gasp away their lives.

Let them destroy themselves. Men would still live on Mars, without the domes.

With the handle of his knife, he smashed the marshelmet.



"If it isn't Ed Smith from Toledo! Small world, isn't it?"

Infinity's Choice



by LARRY T. SHAW and IRWIN STEIN

Note: This department is ordinarily written by Damon Knight, but Mr. Knight has been so busy recently working on a novel of his own that he has been unable to do any reviewing. So for this issue only, the job is being handled by two "guest" reviewers. Mr. Knight will be back in the critic's chair as usual next issue.

THE JOB of getting to other planets will be easy compared to the tremendous chore of colonizing them. Eventually, we may find some which can honestly be called Earthlike, but most will be totally alien and distinctly hostile to life as we know it. If man is to survive on other worlds (and the only alternative is a continued struggle for bare survival on an Earth that keeps getting more crowded), the solution will have to be a drastic one.

These facts—which most science fiction writers find it necessary to ignore most of the time—form the major thesis of *The Seedling Stars* by James Blish

(Gnome Press, \$3.00). Actually, Blish mentions three possible answers to the question of how to survive on inhospitable planets. Man can duplicate his natural habitat within giant domes, as has been done in so many other stories; he can change entire planets to suit himself by "terraforming"; or he can adapt himself to the alien environments by "pantropy."

Sentimental considerations aside, the third answer seems to be by far the most logical one. The first method has obvious limitations and involves never-ending danger; the second would be the most expensive government project ever undertaken. Why, then, has pantropy (which translates freely as "changing everything") been declared illegal? That's the big question that plagues Sweeney, the Adapted Man who is the first protagonist of the book, and in Blish's expert hands it becomes a thoroughly fascinating question indeed.

In a way, though, this brings

us immediately to both the book's greatest strength and greatest weakness. *The Seedling Stars* is one of those "novels" which was originally published in magazines as a group of separate shorter stories—in this case, three novelets and a short story. Blish may have planned—probably did plan—the series as a whole before writing any of the stories. The events themselves comprise a reasonably satisfactory novel. But I was left with the impression that Blish himself had changed in between stories, becoming more interested in his characters' motives than in the things they actually did. As a result, the first novelet, "Seeding Program," which was written last, has a great deal more depth than the other two.

Ostensibly, Sweeney's job is to wreck the pantrope colony on Ganymede—the only outpost of the outlawed Adapted Men—and bring back Dr. Jacob Rullman, who is supposed to know how to change an Adapted Man back to normal. He wants to do this for personal reasons, since his own life as a pantrope has been hellish. But he has been created to do it by the Earth government, he doesn't know why they care enough to go to all that trouble, and finding the answer to that and several subsidiary "whys" is what drives him on.

There's plenty of action in this section, and it's original, exciting stuff. But it's purely secondary. At one point, Sweeney hikes across the surface of Ganymede to get a radio transmitter he hid when he first arrived, so that he can signal the Earth spaceship which is waiting for some word from him. Here's the whole of Blish's description of it: "It took him eleven days, and efforts and privations of which Jack London might have made a whole novel."

This is wonderfully intriguing. And while the next two sections—"The Thing in the Attic" and "Surface Tension"—are extremely intriguing too, they are intriguing almost entirely on a straight-action level. Each of these is concerned with the development of a later colony of Adapted Men; unfortunately, each is essentially the same story—and "Surface Tension" is by far the better of the two. It contains some classic ideas; who will ever forget, for instance, the two-inch wooden spaceship filled with water and a crew of micro-organisms? But while it's all good reading, the latter two-thirds of the book simply aren't on the same level as the first.

"Watershed," the short story which closes the book, is a neat, ironic vignette. The book as a whole is definitely in the "don't miss" category. It isn't a com-

plete success, but if Blish continues to develop at the rate visible here, he may eventually be turning out real science literature which will be classic in every sense of the word.

Coming Attractions, edited by Martin Greenberg (Gnome Press, \$3.50) is a new kind of anthology. The contents are reprinted from science fiction magazines, but they aren't science fiction stories. They're speculative articles, concerned with the kind of ideas that form the foundations of science fiction itself, but based on very solid facts.

The introduction, by Dwight Wayne Batteau, seems to say in highly verbose prose that speculation is fun and that science fiction magazines often indulge in it. This can be skimmed or skipped. The real meat begins with a typically delightful Willy Ley item, "A Letter to the Martian," and continues with the following:

"How to Learn Martian" by Charles F. Hockett; "Language for Time Travelers" by L. Sprague de Camp; "Geography for Time Travelers" by Willy Ley; "Time Travel and the Law" by C. M. Kornbluth; "Space Fix" by R. S. Richardson; "Space War" by Willy Ley; "Space War Tactics" by Malcolm Jameson; "Fuel for the Future" by Jack

Hatcher; "How to Count on Your Fingers" by Frederik Pohl; and "Interplanetary Copyright" by Donald F. Reines.

The contributors are all very well qualified to handle their subjects, and they handle them in highly entertaining fashion. Most of these articles are much more worthy of being included between hard covers than many stories that made anthology appearances during the "boom" days. Several of them have been capably illustrated, the original magazine illustrations having been specially re-drawn for this volume. The volume would make an outstanding addition to any science fiction writer's reference library; the avid fan could make good use of it in proving to his critical friends that "that crazy stuff" isn't really so crazy; and any reader with an inquiring mind should find it enormously enjoyable.

The Man Who Japed by Phillip K. Dick and *The Space Born* by E. C. Tubb appear back to back in an Ace Double book. If we were slightly more ignorant about the editorial method, we might almost attribute this to a deliberate effort to produce a paradigm of the current status of the science-fiction novel. Briefly characterized, the novels are: Dick—an interesting, almost spectacular failure; Tubb—

a competent, thoroughly readable, and thoroughly unexciting success.

As is required of the spectacular, *The Man Who Japed* generates great excitement, throwing off sparks in the form of new (or new-looking) concepts in all directions. A genuine act of creation takes place, with the reader's co-operation. The humorless world of Morec, well-articulated, believable, deadly, comes into being, and the protagonist is set into motion, dancing to the culture's tune.

And here, probably, is where the failure lies. The culture itself is so well made, that the cross currents working against the dominant personality fail to convince. They seem like rational constructs as opposed to emotional experiences. As is so often the case, Alan Lindsey works within the culture, yet in opposition to it. How he alone of all Morec citizens develops an aberrant personality is not sufficiently explained to be convincing. Dick was undoubtedly aware of this failing, and tries, through several scenes involving disaffected teen-agers, to make amends. But these are never more than patches on the sur-

face of his fabric.

The climax too, seems manufactured by the plot necessities, rather than by the fabric of the narrative. It is, in its own way, exciting, even dazzling—and totally lacking in conviction, either to reader or, one suspects, writer. One must blame the exigencies of time and space.

As a whole, however, the book is well worth the reading. More so to our thinking than the Tubbs, which is a perfectly well-made book on a stale theme. It is the *Universe* of Robert Heinlein—but instead of a Universe where all has gone to ruin, a Universe where all functions as intended. The action comes not from conflict of ideas (as in *Man Who Japed*) but from the more ordinary conflicts of personality, ambition and yes, even romance. The whole works smoothly, and if the skeleton shows through occasionally, it is only to be expected. The only real disappointment is the ending, which can be detected by most any seasoned stf hand along about chapter four. Oh, well, it's all in fun, and all good fun, and really quite a promising book-length debut for this up-and-coming Britisher.

∞ ∞ ∞



The Gently Orbiting Blonde

by JOHN VICTOR PETERSON S

Illustrated by ENGLE



**Anti-gravity may be hard
to handle—but a woman
scorned is still harder!**



MAYBE Helene's right in saying that I shouldn't tell exactly how our living room became the training station for Space Satellite One. If I don't, though, I'm afraid she'll let it slip out as a deep dark secret



to one of her tri-dielectronic bridge friends and it'll be all over the Project as quickly as a pile past critical mass. It certainly wouldn't help my reputation at the labs, especially if in the retelling the facts should become distorted about Gladys, the gently orbiting blonde.

Some of it was accidental, certainly, but didn't Wilhelm Roentgen get brushed by the breeze of chance?

I must have been on the right track, anyhow!

I'll leave it to you. . . .

It's true, I *do* get absorbed in things. So it happened on the night I was married. But I did, after all, carry Helene across the threshold. Can I help it that, as I was fetching her a toast, I just happened to glance up at the sun-chandelier in our cathedral-ceilinged living room and got reminded of the Project and decided I just had to go down into my lab in the basement and change one little bit of circuitry? When you're working on something as elusive as anti-gravity, you've got to seize upon every minute of inspiration.

I told her I'd be right back and dashed downstairs. I guess I should have kissed her first. I forgot. I'm sorry now. In a way. If I had, maybe— But, let's face it, I forgot.

You could ask old Ruocco, my psych prof. He always says

I've supernormal powers of concentration.

There I was in the basement. One thing led to another. I rearranged the circuitry on the psionic machine and found then that changes in the gyrorotors were indicated.

Something intruded vaguely on my mind but I ignored it, enmeshed as I was in magnetostriction lines. This just might work!

It didn't. My concentration was disrupted. I glanced at my watch. *Oh!* I thought, *Helene!*

And my subconscious told me with sickening certainty that the near disturbance I had had, had been the slamming of a door— of the front door by someone on the way out.

I went upstairs. Helene was gone, complete with pocketbook. Her valises had been in the car and I saw from the living room window that she'd taken that.

She'd gone home to Mom, I guessed. She'd have no trouble getting off the reservation; she had a nonsensitive job on the Project. Not like me; I couldn't get pried out of White Sands by less than Presidential order.

It'd be hours before I could try visioing her. Mom's way up in Connecticut, quite a hop even by jetliner.

I sat on the chitchat bench, felt sorry for myself for a second and then got concentrating

on the starchart on the ceiling above the sun-chandelier and decided that if man was to start exploring upward I'd better continue my exploring down-stairs.

But I couldn't concentrate. I fiddled around rewiring the psionic machine just to have something to do.

The front door banged again with the loveliest, most satisfying solid bang—and I dropped my soldering iron on a printed circuit and something went *whoosh* which wasn't just me going up the stairs. Simultaneously a feminine scream came to meet me.

I WENT UP the stairs but when I got to the top I didn't—couldn't—stop. I kept going up, making climbing motions and touching nothing at all until my head ricocheted off the curving ceiling and I bounced down upon my contour chair. I didn't stop there but bounced right back up again, vaguely aware that the recoiling chair was slowly following me.

During this time I was seeing considerably more stars than you'd see from Palomar on a good clear night.

The stars began to blink out of focus, and me in. And then, in the midst of marveling over the undeniable fact that I'd discovered—well, what about

Roentgen?—*discovered* anti- or at least *null-gravity*, I remembered (a) the door slamming and (b) the scream.

I bounced off the ceiling, cartwheeled a bit, glanced off a picture of a Viking rocket on the wall which took off on a trajectory of its own, and then spun in my orbit and got a look at the blonde.

Now, anyone under normal conditions would have taken a good look at the blonde. I was, however, performing what is known in aeronautics as a barrel-roll, and my viewing of the blonde was the sweeping scan of a surveillance radar.

Not that I hadn't seen the blonde before. I knew her well. Her name is Gladys. She's the most gorgeously put-together creature at the Sands. Most of the boys would ride bareback on a Nike if she gave them the smile she was giving me then.

Gladys was in a gentle orbit as nearly circular as that of Venus. Her primary was the sun-chandelier.

I thought then of another Venus. Only Gladys has arms. Her arms were bare. In fact, a lot of Gladys was bare and there's a lot of Gladys, all nicely proportioned, of course. The sunsuit's designer had indubitably been inspired by a Bikini.

I bounced off a sofa, which absorbed some of my inertia,

and through some frictional freak stopped my axial rotation. I went then into an elliptical orbit grazing the chitchat bench at aphelion and the chandelier at perihelion.

The thought of Helene crossed my mind in a peculiarly guilty manner, and I was rather glad at that moment that Gladys and I weren't on a collision orbit.

"Now that you've stopped pingponging," Gladys said, "you might tell me how we're going to get out of this fix. And I don't mind behaving like an electron but you might make like a positron and come a little closer; it's getting cold in here! By the way, where's Helene?"

I don't know why, but I told her. And maybe I did put on an aggrieved husband act a bit, but who could blame me?

"Oh, Bill, I'm sorry," she said throatily. "You're so attractive, so fine. To think you've been snared by someone who doesn't appreciate your worth, your handsomeness, your manly strength. Oh, why couldn't you just have given poor little me a glance? After all, we've been together in the Project Lab every day. I *know* you, Bill, and I'm *so* sorry!"

And she moved on, lovely, graceful in her gentle orbit, and my heart swelled with recognition of her compassion.

I started to make a self-effacing remark, stammered, and finally changed my mind and asked, "But how did you happen to come here?"

She sighed. "Business, I'm sorry to state. Jim O'Brien wants you at the lab. Thinks he's on the track of anti-grav—and here you have it already! Gee, Bill, it *is* getting cold in here!"

I hadn't noticed.

Just then the thermostat did notice, and the air-conditioning unit cut in. Warm air started to blow from the baseboard outlets.

"Bill—"

"Yeah," I answered, trajectory past the chitchat bench and wondering if by stretching real hard I could reach it on the next trip round and drag myself to it. Then, if it didn't come unplugged I could ground (now *that* was a silly thought!)—I could *stop* myself and maybe work out of the living room along the edge of the tacked-down carpet.

"Bill, if Helene doesn't come back, do you think, maybe—"

I thought, maybe.

HEY, was I imagining things or was my orbit changing? And was Gladys smiling more warmly?

Oh, oh! The air-vents were doing it, the air currents from

them pressing me into a more curving trajectory which would probably graze Gladys' orbit.

I was passing the chitchat bench. I flailed out for it, missed, and my movement seemed to twist my trajectory even more. I looked at Gladys and she was smiling warmly, welcomingly. I thought of Helene and felt like a louse. An airborne louse. Without wings, like a louse should be. You need wings to fly. If I'd had them I think I'd have flown. Elsewhere.

Sure, you can let your conscience be your guide but what can you do when you're helplessly warped into a collision orbit with one of the loveliest women in the world, a welcoming planet in a closed system of your own peculiar manufacture?

The visio started buzzing then and I wondered agonizingly if it were Helene. On the other hand, it might be Jim O'Brien wondering why Gladys hadn't come back. With no answer, he might come over, but I doubted it. Jim's a bachelor and somewhat of a hermit.

Ah, missed on this go-round, but it was close. Gladys' smile told me she was paying no heed to the buzzing visio at all.

The sun-chandelier—I could reach it! I caught at one of its sunburst's rays. It promptly snapped off, but the action had changed my orbit.

Changed it—and how! Now I was in precisely the same orbit as Gladys and gaining! She smiled back over her nicely rounded shoulder. It wasn't fair!

I hadn't heard a sound outside, what with the visio buzzing away like mad, but the front door was suddenly opened and there was Helene starting to come in, a big package in her arms.

"Stay out!" I cried. "Don't come in, Helene!"

I was a split second too late; her foot hit the null-grav area and she was suddenly orbiting, her package tumbling off on a trajectory of its own, her pocket-book a satellite beside her.

Helene was startled, certainly, but not beyond speech. "Bill Wright," she cried, "you're a beast! You bring me home on our wedding night and leave me for your silly machine and without a single solitary drop to drink in the servomech and I go out for something and come back to find you flying after that blonde hussy!" She swept up around the chandelier, her orbit grazing it at perihelion but apparently destined to be far remote at aphelion.

"But, dear—" I started.

"Don't dear me!" she cried, and went out of my range of vision just as I overtook Gladys and her outflung arms caught

me painfully by the neck.

Which is when Helene's orbit mercifully turned out to be a collision orbit with Gladys'—and she took Gladys away from me like a super-Nike taking out a stratojet-bomber. They bounced against the ceiling. Gladys took the impact. Rearward. Fortunately Mother Nature had been kind.

Helene bounced away from Gladys. Strands of blonde hair went with her.

"Dark roots!" Helene cried triumphantly.

Gladys said a bad word.

I conjectured.

"Say," I said, but the girls were shouting. I yelled, "Hey!"

They quieted but kept glaring balefully at each other and circled like a couple of female wrestlers waiting—but wholly unable—to pounce.

"We're in a pickle," I started.

"*You're* in a pickle," Helene corrected me.

"Oh, stop it!" I said.

"I didn't start it," Helene said.

Logic!

"Now, look," I said, "we've got to get down. If one of us could only manage to grasp something that's fastened—the carpet, a window, a door-knob—"

I didn't finish; it was too painfully obvious that none of

our orbits took us that close to the finite boundaries of my null-grav living room. Helene's, I noticed, was the closest. A germ of an idea came into my mind as I observed that Helene's handbag was still in a tight orbit around her.

"Honey," I said.

She raged at that and made futile fluttering motions as though she thought she just might be able to fly.

Perhaps formality was indicated.

"Mrs. Wright," I tried.

Gladys laughed and the irate Mrs. Wright, sweeping close to Gladys' orbit at perihelion, made a vicious swipe which neatly tore away a considerable portion of the upper part of Gladys' sunsuit, which portion went fluttering away on a bat-like trajectory of its own. I forgot the portion; the point of departure was more absorbing.

Helene gasped and told me to concentrate on getting us down; but my powers of concentration were rather difficult to influence since I was in a fixed orbit and, like Mercury or old Luna, my face was turned inward and Gladys' orbit was now considerably tighter than mine.

"Well, do something, will you!" Helene cried. "At least, stop leering!"

Now I'm a reasonable man even when befuddled by null-

grav, so I tried to forget about orbiting hemispheres and to attack the problem of reaching terra firma.

I closed my eyes, but promptly became so unoriented that I almost became ill; so I opened them again and concentrated on my primary, the sun-chandelier.

The visio had stopped buzzing. I hoped that meant that Jim O'Brien—if it had been Jim—had figured that something was amiss and was now hurrying over in his Caddicopter. He could throw us a line and haul us out. Then I threw that hope away. Jim's severely practical; and this *was* to have been my wedding night.

Oh, well . . .

COULD ONE of us somehow reach the sun-chandelier and short it, thereby shorting the machine downstairs? Mentally reconstructing the house's electrical circuitry, I concluded that my lab was on a separate circuit.

Hey! I am confused, I thought. Helene's handbag! I'd thought of it before. Of course! Women carry all sorts of things.

"Helene," I said, "do you have a squeeze bottle in your bag? Perfume or hair spray or deodorant, maybe?"

"Bill Wright, if you think for one minute that I'm going to—"

"Have you?" I cut in.

She spluttered. "Perfume,"

she finally said grudgingly. "Though with that eau-de-what-ever Gladys is wearing, I should think—"

"Oh, stop it! Now will you please get the perfume out!"

She did; then she went wandering off to aphelion in her orbit and momentarily out of my line of sight. When she came back toward perihelion with the chandelier, I said, "Now, look, wriggle around a little axially if you can—"

That did it. Helene exploded into a verbal nova. "You lecherous beast!" she cried. "It isn't enough for you to dally with this shameless blonde hussy on our wedding night. Not enough for you to float along looking like a blissful ogling ogre, making mental mockery of your wedding vows. No, you—you BEM!—you have to ask your meek and retiring, your quiet and unassuming, your defenseless and self-effacing wife to act like a bumping and grinding burlesque queen!"

And my meek, retiring, quiet, unassuming, etc., wife went on etcetera-ing ad practically infinitum.

When swiftly trajecting Helene's tirade paused for lack of words and/or breath, I said meekly above the gently orbiting blonde's chuckles, "But I was only trying to get us out of this mess. I wanted you to per-

form a slight axial rotation so that you could aim your—er—posterior at the cellar door when you next reach aphelion near it. Do you understand?"

"No," she said, but did manage by some completely feminine and to me quite incomprehensible maneuvers (girdle girding procedure, maybe?) to twist ninety degrees axially.

"When I say 'go,' squeeze the spray bottle," I directed, "and keep squeezing it hard and keep it pointing straight away from your longitudinal axis."

"My *what*? Now, look, what do you think you'll accom—"

"Wait!" I cut her off. "For every action there's an equal and opposite reaction, right? I hope you'll widen your orbit when the reaction sets in."

She was nearing aphelion. "Go!" I cried.

She did squeeze the spray bottle, and kept squeezing it quickly and strongly, but so far as I could judge her orbit wasn't effected one whit. Something was accomplished, however, that made our situation more desperate: those little droplets of potent perfume proceeded to bounce, scatter, splatter and ricochet all over the place. The scent spread. Overpoweringly.

"And *you* talked about *my* perfume!" Gladys cried and began to giggle again.

My gaze wandered toward

the lovely albeit space-happy blonde.

"Bill!" Helene cried as she swept across my line of sight. She looked like an avenging angel, a very lovely one. She made me feel humble and contrite; I went dutifully back to the problem.

IT SEEMED rather hopeless. Both Gladys and I were orbiting nearly parallel to the floor in what I was calling the plane of the ecliptic. My brief encounter with the chandelier had twisted me into the plane as had Gladys' unfortunate but exhilarating encounter with my irate bride.

Helene's orbit was still tilted from the plane, like Pluto's, and was curiously elliptical like a comet's. Currents created by the allegedly draftless air conditioning system must have caused and must be maintaining the ellipse. Being a newcomer to our tight little system, Helene also still had considerable orbital speed whereas air resistance would soon bring Gladys and me to a midair stop, probably in inferior opposition. I knew what Helene would think of that.

I decided we couldn't do anything individually or jointly unless an outside agent were introduced or full advantage taken of something already present.

We had cosmic debris, for sure: the flipflopping chaise longue which was in a tight orbit near the peak of the cathedral ceiling; the framed picture of the Viking rocket (could I ever use a little of *its* thrust now!) fluttering close to the flapping torn part-away of the sunsuit down below the plane of the ecliptic; and the big package Helene had brought. The last suddenly proved to be on a collision orbit with Gladys, curving in then to bump against her derriere. Reaching back swiftly she caught it like an errant salesman's hand. I waited expectantly.

"Wonderful!" she commented. "Wonderful!" And pulled out a bottle of Scotch. I watched in fascinated, gleeful anticipation as she unscrewed the cap, and moved the bottle up toward celestial north to reach a normal drinking position. Naturally the contents promptly departed; then splashed against the arch of the ceiling and went into a thousand odd orbits, of which many made moist contact with my own. The perfume-Scotch combination—*yoicks!*

"Glad," I said.

"Oh, it's *Glad* now!" Helene burst.

I ignored her.

"Glad, get the package in your hands like a basketball—"

"Yes, conceal your shame!"

Helene cut in acidly.

"Will you stop it?" I cried. "Now, Glad, listen, aim it toward my orbit. Lead me a little—there, that ought to do it. Now when I count down to zero give it a shove. Ready? Three, two, one—*zero!*"

It was dead on!

I looked in the bag, hoping to find a newly charged carbonation unit for the servomech bar. I didn't, but I found something else!

"Helene," I said, "I love you!"—and I drew forth the loveliest magnum of champagne you'd ever hope to see.

"But, Bill," Helene cried, "that's to celebrate our wedding night!"

I appreciated the present tense but said nothing, working on the wire which bound the cork.

"Bill, remember what happened to the Scotch," Gladys warned me.

I ignored them both, thinking furiously. It *had* to be Helene! She would sweep to the apogee of her cometlike orbit near the cellar door again in seconds. I shook the magnum as violently as I could. Its cork went whooshing off on a ricochet romance with the Scotch cap. The freed and deeply disturbed champagne blasted off straight for the most remote point in Helene's orbit—and Helene

was there! On target!

I went whirling backward with the reacting magnum against my chest, bounced against a wall, smacked against the chandelier, flipfopped a few times and found myself orbiting directly below Gladys. I reoriented myself with some effort and found by twisting my head sharply that I could see the results of the improvised jet blast: Helene, drenched with champagne, stood in gravity on the cellar stairs.

"Dear," I ventured, "just go down and ease off on the rheostat; that'll cancel this out gradually and let us down easily."

She made a spluttering noise and went downstairs.

I made a quick survey for a possible safe touchdown area just in case Helene inadvertently cut the power too fast; chances were good that we'd hit one of the several sofas.

Gladys and I were celestially north of the chitchat bench when Helene completely killed the null-grav. The bench, with visio, suffered complete collapse; it wasn't meant for sitting down on from twelve feet up. Especially with a blonde dropping immediately into one's lap. Lucky for me both were nicely padded.

"I'm sorry, Bill," Gladys said, *September Morn-ing*, and hurrying, dishevelled and forlorn,

out the front door. I heard her car start up as Helene came up from the basement.

I ruefully surveyed the shattered visio amid the other debris.

"Null-grav," I said. "Real null-grav. Jim's got to know—but the visio's ruined. I've got to go out and call him."

"Oh, no, you don't!" Helene burst. "Null-grav and Jim O'Brien can wait until tomorrow!"

She kissed me tenderly then.

"How right you are," I said, getting re-oriented fast.

Now YOU MUST excuse me; I've got to degravitize the living room. They're due here for training in a few minutes—the Satellite One Cadets. I worked out a keyer that remotely controls the null-grav's rheostat; it's calibrated to permit creating any sub-gravitational effect from one G down to null-G. Those boys are really getting trained.

Someday I'll duplicate the null-grav over at the Project—Jim O'Brien and I have nearly got the circuitry licked—and we'll have the living room all to ourselves. Jim and his blushing bride—Gladys—come over almost every evening after the Cadets are through. We play null-grav polo, orbital chess and some other games we've adapted. Our favorite, though, is "Pick Your Planet" where we

take turns imitating the orbit of one of Sol's planets, planetoids, moons or visiting comets, and pantomiming other clues.

Funny, but most often Helene or Gladys chooses Venus. With them, poor cold old Pluto's out. Women are funny that way.

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The Eyes of Silence

(Continued from page 49)

like that. And then I felt that I was being watched."

"The spy-eyes," said Fromach. "But they are soundless."

"I sensed them," said Ward. "I told you that, after a period of isolation, a man gets to sense things. I was lucky—I'd learned to live with myself—but what about the others? They were alone, they knew it, and yet they sensed something watching them. To me that seems just the kind of conflict that would tear a man apart."

"And then?"

"I guessed the set-up. This is a watch-station, sure, but not in the way you said. It's designed to watch the man inside, not events outside. It's a training cell for—what?"

"For what it should be but isn't," said Fromach bitterly. "For the ships we hope one day to send beyond where we are. And more than that. Men must learn to live with themselves if

they are to live at all. We're out of the nest now, out of the cradle. It's time we discovered how to grow up."

"You can't change people," said Ward slowly. "I survived because I had the sense to retreat to an environment to which I'd grown accustomed. Others retreat back into the womb." He looked at his hands. "What happens now?"

"You're free," said Fromach. "Special reduction of sentence for unusual duties."

"Thanks."

"You've earned it," said Fromach.

"And the problem?"

"We'll solve it," said Fromach. "We'll—" He broke off, staring at Ward, suddenly remembering that what a man knew he could teach. Ward had survived where others had failed. If?

"We'll solve it," said Ward. Fromach had his answer.

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DENY THE SLAKE

by RICHARD WILSON

Those couplets held

(unless they lied)

The reason why

a world had died!

Illustrated by GAUGHAN

DENY THE SLAKE

THE SKIPPER looked at what Ernest Hotaling had scribbled on the slip of paper.

*The color of my true love's
cheek*

*Will turn to gray within a
week.*

The skipper read it and exploded. "What kind of nonsense is this?"

"Of course it wouldn't rhyme in a literal translation," Ernest

said mildly. "But that's the sense of it."

"Doggerel!" the skipper exclaimed. "Is this the message of the ages? Is this the secret of the lost civilization?"

"There are others, too," Ernest said. He was the psychologist-linguist of the crew. "You've got to expect them to be obscure at first. They didn't purposely leave any message for us."

Ernest sorted through his scraps of paper and picked one out:

*They warn me once, they
warn me twice.*

*Alas! my heedn't turns me
spice.*

"There seems to be something there," Ernest said.

The skipper snorted.

"No, really," Ernest insisted.

"An air of pessimism—even doom—runs all through this stuff. Take this one, for instance:

*"Music sings within my
brain:*

*I think I may go mad
again."*

"Now that begins to make some sense," said Rosco, the communications chief. "It ties in with what Doc Braddon found."

The skipper looked searchingly at his technicians, as if he suspected a joke. But they were serious.

"All right," the skipper said.

"It baffles me, but I'm just a simple spacefaring man. *You're* the experts. I'm going to my cabin and communicate with the liquor chest. When you think you've got something I can understand, let me know. 'I think I may go mad again.' Huh! I think I may get drunk, myself."

WHAT THE TECHNICIANS of the research ship *Pringle* were trying to learn was why the people of Planetoid S743 had turned to dust.

They had thought at first they were coming to a living, if tiny, world. There had been lights on the nightside and movement along what seemed to be roads.

But when they landed and explored, they found only powder in the places where there should have been people. There were heaps of fine-grained gray powder in the streets, in the driving compartments of the small cars—themselves perfectly preserved—and scattered all through the larger vehicles that looked like buses.

There was powder in the homes. In one home they found a heap of the gray stuff in front of a cookstove which was still warm, and another heap on a chair and on the floor under the chair. It was as if a woman and the man for whom she'd been preparing a meal had gone *poof*, in an instant.

The crew member who'd been on watch and reported the lights said later they could have been atmospherics. The skipper himself had seen the movement along the roads; he maintained a dignified silence.

It had been a highly developed little world and the buildings were incredibly old. The weather had beaten at them, rounding their edges and softening their colors, but they were as sturdy as if they'd been built last week.

All the cities on the little world were similar. And all were dead. The *Pringle* flew over a dozen of them, then returned to the big one near the plain where the ship had come down originally.

The tallest building in each city was ornate out of all proportion to the rest. The researchers reasoned that this was the palace, or seat of government. Each of these buildings had a network of metal tubing at its peak. Where there were great distances between cities, tall towers rose from the plains or sat on tops of mountains, each with a similar metal network at the apex.

The communications chief guessed that they were radio-video towers but he was proved wrong. There were no radio or television sets anywhere, or anything resembling them.

Still, it was obvious that they were a kind of communications device.

Doc Braddon got part of the answer from some of the gray dust he'd performed an "autopsy" on.

The dust had been found in a neat mound at the bottom of a large metal container on the second-story of a medium-sized dwelling. Doc theorized that one of the people had been taking some sort of waterless bath in the container when the dust death came. The remains were thus complete, not scattered or intermingled as most of the others were.

Doc sorted the particles as best he could and found two types, one definitely inorganic. He conferred with Rosco on the inorganic residue. Rosco thought this might be the remains of a tiny paradio transceiver. Possibly each of the people had carried one around with him, or built into him.

"We're only guessing that they were people," Doc said cautiously, "though it would seem safe to assume it, since we've found dust everywhere people could be expected to be. What we need is a whole corpse."

While patrols were out looking for bodies Rosco tested his theory by sending a radio signal from one of the towers and

watching a feeble reaction in the dust.

"If we can assume that they were people," Rosco said, "they apparently communicated over distances by personalized radio. Maybe through a mechanism built into the skull. Would that mean there wouldn't be any written language, Ernest?"

Ernest Hotaling shrugged. "Not necessarily. I should think they'd have kept records of some kind. They could have been written, or taped—or chipped into stone, for that matter."

He asked the lieutenant to enlarge his search. "Bring me anything that looks like a book, or parchment, or microfilm, or tape. If it's chipped in stone," he added with a grin, "I'll come to it."

Meanwhile they ran off the film that had been grinding away automatically ever since the planetoid came within photoradar range of the ship. The film confirmed what the lookout reported—there had been lights on the nightside.

Furthermore, one of the sensitized strips at the side of the film showed that signals, which had been going out from the tower tops in a steady stream, increased furiously as the *Pringle* approached. Then, as the ship came closer, they stopped altogether. At the same instant the lights on the night-

side of the planetoid went out. The film showed that the road movement the skipper had seen stopped then, too.

Ernest tried to analyze the signals reproduced on the film. He had small success. If they represented a language, it would take years before he could even guess what they meant. The only thing he was sure of was that the signals, just before they died, had become a thousand times more powerful.

"Maybe that's what killed them," Rosco said.

"Possibly," Ernest said. "It begins to look as if the people were deliberately killed, or committed suicide, all at once, when we hove into sight. But why?"

"You tell me," Rosco said. "That sounds like your department."

But Ernest could tell him nothing until after the lieutenant came back with a long slender cylinder enclosing a seemingly endless coil of fine wire. The lieutenant also brought a companion cylinder, apparently a means of playing back what was recorded on the coil.

Ernest experimented until he learned how to operate it, then shooed everybody out of his cabin and went to work.

ERNEST HOTALING had joined the crew of the research ship

Pringle on Ganymede as a replacement for Old Craddock, who'd decided on short notice that thirty years of spacefaring were enough. It would be another ten or twelve years before the *Pringle* returned to Earth and though Craddock was only seventy-eight his yearning to start a proper bee farm became overwhelming.

The others were not unhappy about his departure. The swarm he'd kept in his cabin was small but the bees were gregarious and were as likely to be found in the recreation room as in their hive. So when Craddock and the paraphernalia he'd collected over the decades had debarked, the rest of the crew sighed in collective relief and the skipper went looking for a replacement.

Ernest Hotaling, fresh out of Ganymede U., was the only man qualified, on the record, for the job. He had the necessary languages and his doctorate was in psychology, though his specialty was child therapy.

The skipper puzzled through the copy of Ernest's master's thesis. The lad—he was twenty-three then—had devoted it to children's folklore. The skipper, admittedly a simple man, wasn't sure it contributed profitably to the world's knowledge to spend a year in the study and explanation of *Winnie the Pooh*, or *Step on a crack/Break your*

mother's back, or *The Wizard of Oz*.

The skipper had gone to Space Prep at the age of fourteen and later to the Academy itself and there were obviously wide areas of childhood that had passed him by. He'd never heard of *Struwwelpeter*, for instance, or *Ibbety bibbety gibbety goat*, and he wondered if a grown man who immersed himself in this sort of thing was the one for the job.

What was worse was that Hotaling, according to the University yearbook, was a poet.

But when the skipper interviewed Hotaling and found him to be a lean, muscular young man who'd obviously had a haircut in the past week and who laughed genuinely at one of the skipper's more purple stories, he signed him on immediately.

The skipper had one last thought. "You don't keep bees, do you?"

"Not even in my bonnet," Ernest said.

"Then we'll get along. Just keep your nursery rhymes to yourself."

"Aye, aye, sir," said Ernest.

"LOOK," Ernest told the skipper, "I've studied their literature, if that's what it is, until I'm saturated with it. Maybe it doesn't make sense to you but I've worked out a sort of pat-

tern. It's an alien culture, sure, and there are gaps in it, but what there is fits together."

"All right," the skipper said. "I'm not questioning your findings. I just want to know why it has to be in that ridiculous rhyme."

"Because they were a poetic people, that's why. And it doesn't *have* to be in rhyme. I could give you the literal translation, but it was rhymed originally and when I make it rhyme in English too you get a more exact idea of the kind of people they were."

"I suppose so," the skipper said. "As long as we don't have to report to the Flagship in the sonnet form I guess I can put up with it. I just don't want to become the laughing stock of the fleet."

"It's no laughing matter," Ernest said. "It's pretty tragic, in any number of ways. In the first place, as Rosco suspected, they communicated by radio. But they had no privacy and couldn't hide anything from anybody. They were always listened in on by the big boys in the palace."

"How do you know?"

"By the coil I worked from. It's a listening-storing device. These aren't official records I've transcribed; they're the everyday expressions of everyday people. And everyone of them had been

taken down and stored away, presumably so it could be used against the person who expressed it, if it ever became necessary.

"But they couldn't always get through to the person they wanted to reach, even though they got through to the coil. Here's a sad little lover's lament, for instance:

*"My plea to her is lost, as
though
The other three command the
flow."*

"Like a busy signal?" asked the skipper.

"Very much like one," Ernest said, pleased by the skipper's comprehension. "On the other hand, they always got the messages from the palace. These took priority over all other traffic and were apt to come at any time of the day or night. The people were just one big captive audience."

"What about the dust? That seems to be a recurring theme in those jingles of yours."

"It is," Ernest quoted:

*"Dust is he and dust his
brother;*

They all follow one another."

"They're all dust now," the skipper said. "Did they have a revolution, finally, that killed everybody off?"

"Both sides—the rulers and the ruled, simultaneously? Maybe so." Ernest sorted through

his pieces of paper. "There's this one, with its inference of the death of royalty along with that of the common man:

*"Comes the King! O hear him
rustle;*

*Falter, step, and wither,
muscle."*

The skipper was beginning to be exasperated again.

"I'll be in my cabin," he said. "You seem to accomplish more when I keep out of your way. But if you want to join me in a little whiskey to keep the falters and withers at bay, come along."

THE LIEUTENANT knocked at Ernest's door in the middle of the night. "Mister Hotaling!" he called urgently.

Ernest fumbled into a pair of pants and opened the door.

"One of the men found this thing," the lieutenant said. "We were going to keep it locked up till morning but it's driving me crazy. Figured you'd better have a look at it."

The thing was a blue-green puppet of a creature wearing—or made of—a kind of metallic sailcloth. It was about three feet tall, a caricature of a human being. It hung limp by one arm from the lieutenant's grasp, its head lolling on its shoulder.

"What is it?" Ernest asked sleepily, "a doll?"

"No; it's just playing dead now. It was doing a clog step in

the cage before." He gave the thing a shake. "The worst of it is, it hummed all the time. And the humming seems to mean something."

"Bring it in here," Ernest said. He was fully awake now. "Put it in the armchair and stick around in case I can't handle it."

The creature sat awkwardly where it was put. But then the eyes, which a moment ago had seemed to be painted on the face, shifted and looked squarely at Ernest. It hummed at him.

"I see what you mean," he told the lieutenant. "It seems to be trying to communicate. It's the same language as on the coils." He stared at it. "I wish it didn't remind me of Raggedy Andy. Where did you find it?"

"In the throneroom of the palace. One of the men on guard there grabbed it as it came out of a panel in the wall. He grabbed it and it went limp, like a doll."

"Listen," said Ernest.

*"Don't you cry, boys; don't
you quiver,
Though all the sand is in your
liver."*

"What's that?" the lieutenant said. "Do you feel all right, Mister Hotaling?"

"Sure. That's what he said. Raggedy Andy here. I translated it—with a little poetic license."



"What does it mean?"

"I don't think it's a direct message to us. More likely it's something filed away inside his brain, or electronic storage chamber or whatever he's got. The verse is in the pattern of the ones I translated the other day. The question now is whether Andy has any original thoughts in his head or whether he's just a walking record library."

"How can you tell?"

"By continuing to listen to him, I suppose. A parrot might fool you into thinking it had intelligence of its own, if you didn't know anything about parrots, but after a while you'd realize it was just a mimic. Right, Andy?"

The puppet-like creature hummed again and Ernest listened, gesturing the lieutenant to be quiet.

Finally Ernest said:

*"Down the valley, down the
glen*

*Come the Mercials, ten by
ten."*

"That makes as much sense as the one about the liver," the lieutenant said.

"Takes it a bit further, I think. No, seriously. 'Mercials' is a set of syllables I made up, as short for 'commercials'—or the sand in their craw, the thumb in their soup—all the things they had to put up with as the most captive of all audiences."

"That wasn't an original thought, then?"

"Probably not. Andy may be trying me out with a few simple couplets before he throws a really hard one. I wonder if he knows he's got through to me." He laughed as the lieutenant looked at him oddly. "I don't mean *he*, personally. I know as well as you do he's some kind of robot."

"I see. You mean, is somebody controlling him now, or is he just reacting to a stimulus the way he was built to do?"

"Exactly." Ernest frowned at the doll-like creature. "I suppose the scientific way would be to dissect him—it. Take it apart, I mean. I've got to stop thinking of it as a him. We'd better get Doc Braddon in on this."

He punched the 'com button to Doc's cabin. The sleepy voice that answered became alert as Ernest explained. Doc arrived minutes later with an instrument kit, looking eager.

"So this is your new toy," he said. The creature, which had been slumped listlessly in the chair, seemed to look at Doc with distaste. It hummed something. Doc looked inquiringly at Ernest. "Have you two established communication?"

"It's a robot," Ernest said defensively. "The question is, could we learn more by leaving it intact and pumping it for

whatever information is stored up inside it, or by taking it apart? For instance, it just said:

*"Uninterred beyond the hills
Lie never weres and never
wills."*

Doc became excited. "It really said that?"

"Well, not in so many words. It said—"

"I know, I know. Your poetic license hasn't expired. I mean, that *is* the gist of it? That somewhere back of the hills there's a charnel heap—a dump of corpses, or miscarriages—something of the sort?"

"You could put that interpretation on it," Ernest said. "I got the impression of something abortive."

"That's the best lead yet," Doc said. "If we could find anything other than dust piles, no matter how embryonic—Lieutenant, your boys must have been looking in the wrong places. How soon can you get a detail out over the hills?"

The lieutenant looked at his watch. "If I've got this screwy rotation figured out, dawn's about half an hour off. That soon enough?"

"It'll have to do."

"What about Raggedy Andy here?" Ernest asked. "Do we keep him intact?"

"Don't touch a hair of his precious head," Doc said. "He's earned a stay of dissection."

The creature, still quiet in the chair, its eyes vacant now, hummed almost inaudibly. Ernest bent to listen.

"Well?" Doc said.

"Strictly a non-sequitur," Ernest told him:

"Here we go, lass, through the heather;

Naught to daunt us save the tether."

"It makes me sad," Doc said. He yawned. "Maybe it's just the hour."

COOK had accomplished his usual legerdemain with the space rations but the breakfast table was less appreciative than usual.

"The detail's been gone a long time," Doc Braddon said, toying with an omelet. "Do you think it's a wild goose chase?"

"Reminds me of a time off Venus," the skipper said. "Before any of you were born, probably . . ."

His juniors listened politely until the familiar narrative was interrupted by the 'com on the bulkhead. They recognized the voice of Sergeant Maraffi, the non-com in charge of the crew in the scout craft.

"We found something. Looks like bodies. Well preserved but incomplete. Humanoid."

"Bring 'em back," the skipper said. "As many as you've got room for in the sling." He

added as an afterthought: "Do they smell?"

"Who knows?" Maraffi said. "I sure don't aim to take off my helmet to find out. They're not decomposed, though."

The skipper grumbled to Doc: "I thought you checked the atmosphere."

"There isn't any," Doc said, annoyed. "Didn't you read my report?"

"All right," the skipper said, not looking at him. "I can't do everything. I naturally assumed these people breathed."

"If they did, it wasn't air," Doc said.

"Bring back all you can, Maraffi," the skipper said. "But leave them outside the ship. Everybody on the detail takes double decontamination. And we'll put you down for hazard pay."

"Aye, aye, sir. We're on our way."

"THEY'RE ANDROIDS," Doc said. He'd gone out in a protective suit to the grisly pile. "These must be the false starts."

The other technicians watched him on a closed-circuit hook-up from inside the ship.

"Are they like us?" Ernest asked. "They look it from here—what there is of them."

"Damn near," Doc said. "Smaller and darker, though. Rosco, you were right about the

communication. There's a tiny transceiver built into their skulls. Those that have heads, that is."

"If that's the case," Rosco said, "then why weren't these—stillbirths, whatever you want to call them—turned to dust like the others?"

"Because they'd never been activated," Doc said. "You can't blow a fuse if it isn't screwed in. Skipper, I've seen about all my stomach can stand for now. I suppose I'm a hell of a queasy sawbones, but these—things—are too much like human beings for me to take much more of them at the moment."

"Come on back," the skipper said. "I don't feel too sturdy myself."

ERNEST HOTALING was writing verse in his cabin when the lieutenant intercommmed him. He had just written, in free translation:

*A girl is scarcely long for the
road*

*If passion'd arms make her
corrode.*

Ernest wasn't entirely satisfied with the rhyme, though he felt he'd captured the sense of it. The lieutenant's call interrupted his polishing. He touched the 'com and said: "Hotaling."

"Patrol's back, Mister Hotaling. You'll want to see what they found."

"Another heap of false starts? No, thanks."

"Not this time. They found some people. Two live people."

"Alive! Be right there."

He raced down, then fretted as he waited for Doc to fumigate the people as they came through the airlock. Ernest saw them dimly through the thick glass. They were quite human-looking. But how had they survived whatever had turned thousands of their fellows to dust? Or were these—a man and a woman, elderly and fragile-looking—the rulers who had dusted the others?

"How much longer, Doc?" he asked.

Doc grinned. "In about two quatrains and a jingle, Ernest."

THEY BROUGHT the couple to the main lounge and set them down at a long table. The skipper took a seat at the far end. Apparently he planned to listen but not take part in the questioning. That would be up to Ernest Hotaling, if he could establish communication.

He'd mastered the language to the extent that he'd been able to transcribe the record-coils and understand the robot, but whether he could speak it intelligibly enough so that these living—he almost thought "breathing"—people would understand him was a question.

Doc Braddon took a seat next to the couple. Rosco was on the other side of them and Ernest opposite them, across the table.

Up close, it was obvious that they were androids. But they had been remarkably made. They had none of the jerkiness of movement or blankness of expression that had characterized Earth's attempts along the same lines.

Ernest explained his doubts about his ability to make himself understood and asked his shipmates to be patient with him. He smiled at the couple and said to them in English: "Welcome to our ship." Then he repeated it in their humming language.

They returned his smile and the old woman said something to the man. Rosco looked inquiringly at Ernest, who shook his head.

Ernest made a face. "I forgot to put it in verse. I'll try again."

This time the response was immediate. Both man and woman spoke at once. Then the woman smiled and nodded to the man to talk for both of them.

It was just a curious sing-song humming for the rest of them, but Ernest listened with rapt attention and apparent comprehension, though not without strain.

Finally the man stopped.

"What did he say?" Rosco demanded.

"Let me get the rest of it first," Ernest said. He spoke to the man briefly. His expression became grave as he listened to the reply.

"Well, come *on!*" Doc said impatiently. "Give us a translation."

"All right," Ernest said. He looked troubled. "These two are the only ones left of their race. The rest are dead—de-activated. The others—the other race—left the planetoid some time ago."

Ernest spoke again to the man. Listening to his reply, he found it difficult to think of him as non-human. There was a sadness, a fatalism, in his eyes, yet a dignity that came only with humanity. Only a hairline separated these two from mankind.

The impatience of the others made Ernest interrupt, so he could give them a resumé.

"As I said, they're the last. They survived only because they'd made a pilgrimage to a kind of underground shrine. The signals that killed the others didn't reach them through the layers of rock. Apparently the shrine had something to do with a planned revolt against the electronic law that governed them.

"It was an insidious law," Ernest went on, "with built-in enforcement. Any infraction

could be punished instantly from central control in the palace. The infraction would trigger a shock wave, tuned to the individual frequency of the offender. The intensity of the wave was geared to the seriousness of the offense. Treason meant death from the strongest wave of all—the one that turned them to dust."

"Absolute rule," Doc said. "Pretty hopeless."

"Yes, in one way. But paradoxically they had an infinite amount of freedom of speech. You see that in their verses. No one was punished for what he said—only for what he did. I suppose it had to be that way, otherwise there'd have been wholesale slaughter."

"Which there was, at the end," Doc pointed out. "Who do you think exercised the control that killed all the others?"

"We did," Ernest said. "We killed them."

"WE KILLED them?" Doc said. "You're crazy!"

"You'd better explain yourself, Hotaling," the skipper said. "Stop talking in riddles."

"Aye, aye, sir. When I say we killed them, I don't mean directly or deliberately. And of course I don't mean killed, since they were all androids. But we de-activated them by triggering some mechanism when our ship

came to the planetoid their masters had left."

"Hold on," the skipper said. "Now you're going too fast. Since they were androids, and were created, the important thing is to find out where these creators went—and whether it was last month or ten thousand years ago."

Ernest spoke to the couple.

"It was a long time before we came," he translated. "They don't know how long—their feeling of time is vague. They kept no records of their own and because there were no children they have no conception of generations. They were created adults, in various stages of maturity. As for who the others were—they were the Masters, with a capital M; gods, almost, in their view, with absolute power over them."

"Where did they go?" the skipper asked. "And why? Let's try to get more facts and less philosophy."

"They went looking for a better world, where conditions for life would be more favorable. Whether that means for the Masters or for their creations isn't clear. Nobody consulted them. They'd been given experimental life, only it was more a loan than a gift, to be foreclosed if they displeased the Masters or in any way threatened their experiment."

"The Masters were like themselves in appearance. Whether they were air breathers isn't clear because these two have no conception of what breathing is. The Masters did wear elaborate costumes but whether these were breathing suits or merely the trappings of their superiority is a question.

"I asked if the Masters were trying to create a new set of bodies for themselves, possibly because their own were breaking down or were diseased. The answer to that, like the answer to so many other questions, is that they simply don't know."

There was a commotion at the doorway. The soldier on guard there made a futile grab at something. The something was the puppet-like creature Ernest had named Andy, which evaded him and ran into the room. It jumped lightly to the table, faced the old couple and pointed both its arms at them.

Their expressions, as they regarded the puppet, were of sorrowful resignation. The man clasped the woman's hand.

The puppet spoke, in a brief piercing hum. There was an instant of quiet, then the dullest of popping sounds. The couple, who one second had seemed as alive as any of the Earthmen, the next second were little mounds of gray powder on the chairs and under the chairs.

The lieutenant burst in, followed by the sergeant. "The Andy doll got out of the cage!" he cried. "Did it come in here?"

"Did it come in here?" the skipper mimicked. "Get out, lieutenant, and take your comic-opera soldiers with you." To the technicians at the table he yelled: "Grab that obscene thing!"

The doll, grabbed from several directions, was torn apart, spilling out a reddish-brown spongelike substance.

Something else came out, too: a perforated disk the size of a fist. Rosco retrieved it as it rolled along the table, then quickly dropped it in an ash tray.

"The damn thing's hot," he said.

Doc Braddon, still looking stunned, asked Ernest: "What did the doll say to them before it destroyed them?"

"It was a sort of law-enforcing robot. They told me about it. A kind of custodian the Masters left behind to keep things in line." Ernest stared dully at the empty chairs.

"It said:

*"You bid, and I
Now bid you die!"*

Rosco toyed with the ash tray in which he'd put the disk. "There's a clue to the Masters right in this gadget," he said. "Maybe it's simply a servo-mechanism that was set once

and has been functioning automatically ever since. But on the other hand it may still be linked directly to the Masters."

"Good point," the skipper said. "Give it a run-through for what it's worth. If it does give us a line on where they got to, I'll ask the Flagship for permission to track them down."

Doc Braddon said to Ernest: "You said the Masters were godlike. You're not implying anything supernatural?"

"No. That was the androids' view, not mine. As a race of almost-people created in a laboratory they naturally held their creators in a certain awe. They hoped for liberation, and even tried to do something about it; but they knew it was futile. The Masters built them so they'd turn to dust if they misbehaved and when they left they fixed it so the vibrations of any spaceship other than their own would do the same thing—presumably so their creations wouldn't fall into other hands. The sad thing is that the almost-people knew it. One of their verses went:

*"If comes the ship to make us
free,
It killeth you, it killeth me."*

"Do you mean we could have saved them if we'd come in with engines silent?" the skipper asked.

"I don't know," Ernest said. "They certainly didn't think much of their potential. There's a fatalism, a sense of thwarted destiny running all through their literature. Their hope died on the vine, so to speak. If you can stand one more of their verses, this one might sum up their philosophy:

*"This they give to us they
make:*

*They give us thirst, deny the
slake."*

THE SKIPPER was silent for a time, staring down at the little mounds of gray dust.

Then he said to his technicians:

"You've done a good job, all of you. We'll send a coordinated report to the Flagship tomorrow and stand by for orders. In the meantime, if there's anyone here with an honest physical thirst, I'd be glad to have him join me in slaking it in my cabin. No offense implied, Ernest."

"None taken, sir."

00 00 00

By the editor



ANY OLD SAWS TODAY?

SCIENCE FICTION writers try, at least as hard as any others, to avoid clichés. How well they succeed would be hard to say exactly; there are no comparative statistics. But I think they do extremely well, on the whole. Which is not too surprising when you consider that most readers of science fiction dislike clichés—otherwise they'd probably read something else. The writers have to avoid the obvious and trite, or fail to sell their stories!

Naturally, sf isn't perfect in this regard. We have our ideacliches, like hyperspace and time travel—stock props we'd be considerably poorer without. We have verbal clichés, too, particularly in the stories of those authors who are powerful ideamen but not the most polished stylists. But we do try hard.

Under the circumstances, there's always the danger that we will forget that clichés can be useful. A phrase would not become a cliché in the first place unless it contained enough truth

—or apparent truth—to make people repeat it often. With many repetitions, the original truth can become lost or obscured, but it's there in the majority of cases. Careful examination of the cliché can bring the original thought to light again, and the process can be valuable.

Let's take an example. "Accidents will happen" is a phrase we've all heard so frequently that most of us pay it no attention whatever. But it is flatly true. Accidents *will* happen. No matter how far into the future we go, a world with no accidents whatever is unthinkable.

How many of us, though, take possible accidents into consideration when we make plans? Traffic and safety authorities, and the automobile manufacturers themselves, have finally concluded that it's impossible to design cars and highways in such a way that accidents will never take place. Instead, the past couple of years, they've added features to cars that will protect the occupants in case of

accident. This makes the best kind of sense—but safety belts are meeting an awful lot of sales resistance!

How does this apply to science fiction? Considered in terms of stories that haven't been written yet, it points the way to a largely untapped vein of ideas. We have often, in the past, destroyed the world through deliberate villainy, perverse monkey business, and purely natural disasters—but how often have we done so by accident? Our villains are BEM's, super-scientific criminals, anti-scientific mobs, and the like—but what's wrong with the laws of chance?

There have been exceptions, of course. The invention or discovery made by accident has been used often enough in science fiction to be a cliché of sorts (although a good, imaginative writer can still do a lot with it, as John Victor Peterson proves in this issue). The spaceship does go out of control accidentally once in a great while, but deliberate sabotage is a lot more likely to rear its ugly head—and some otherwise good stories have been all but ruined when the stage villain's motives

weren't entirely convincing. When a fictional machine fails to work, the hero takes it apart and finds the reason—a thing even expert technicians can't do 100% of the time in real life.

This does not mean I'm going to start looking for stories in which the problems are solved when the villains are struck by lightning or accidentally shoot themselves through the heads. Such tricks are not taboo because they occur accidentally, though, but because they're too pat to be believed. What I have in mind is something more like Lester del Rey's *Nerves*, a wonderfully suspenseful novel based from start to finish on an accident in an atomic plant.

And "accidents will happen," of course, is only one cliché. There are a million more available, free for the asking. Take some apart and see what you find. I don't guarantee that the method will produce story plots—but there's no guaranteed method of doing that, anyway. And at worst, it can be a fascinating parlor game.

Besides, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, any day in the week! —LTS

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Feedback



READERS' letters are welcomed, and as many as possible will be printed in this department. Naturally, we're anxious to learn your opinions about INFINITY and its contents, but discussions of any scientific or science-fictional subjects may be included. Send your letters to the Editor, c/o Royal Publications, 47 E. 44th St., New York 17, N. Y.

∞

I am writing in reference to the letter written by Mr. Harter in your December issue of INFINITY. He very successfully got rid of two of the effects due to travel close to the speed-of-light but there are a couple of things that happen to you as you approach the speed-of-light that he did not explain. One thing is the effect of objects contracting in the direction of flight. Now I won't ask you to explain the effect of having infinitely slow time if you go at the same speed as light. But I would like to know what happens when

a spaceship gains negative mass as the result of going faster-than-light? The time becomes negative if you go faster-than-light. Also your size. Now I may be wrong but these are the effects that I have always thought happened when you travel close to or faster than the speed-of-light. Don't hesitate to correct me if I'm wrong.—Ray Rogers, 315 W. 56th St., Hialeah, Fla.

(Mr. Harter's letter touched off a number of questions and rebuttals. The letter that follows, however, is brief, to the point, and ought to settle the matter. Factually speaking, that is—we're sure science fiction writers will go right on treating the speed of light as cavalierly as ever.—Ed.)

∞

The December issue of INFINITY carried a letter by one Joseph W. Harter, which went to some length to "prove" that faster-than-light travel was possible. Unfortunately, Mr. Harter's argument is grounded in a mis-

conception. He incorrectly used the term "mass" in its popular sense to mean "weight," when it actually means resistance to change of motion. A spaceship traveling at the speed of light would have infinite mass, *id est*, infinite resistance to change of motion; that is, it could not go faster, nor could it decelerate.—

John C. Roberts, Box 193,
Spring Hill, Kansas.

∞

Isaac Asimov may gripe because he waited until your second issue to write you a letter, but now he can look down on me, waiting all this time. Actually, I was just waiting so that I could rate the best stories of your first year of publishing. This was a job; INFINITY is one of the best mags of the year. Why? Well, one reason is that you publish science fiction which is worth reading. More than once, too. The type of story that you—or me, at least—read over and over again and never get tired of. Like Heinlein or Sturgeon or any other great writer at his best. You publish that kind of fiction. I'd call it potential classic material, since all it lacks is the proper age.

Anyway, what happened was that I had a list of the top five stories and suddenly I decided that three of them weren't up

to the quality of the first two. So here I am with two lists. The first goes like this:

"The Engineer" by Pohl and Kornbluth.

"The Superstition-Seeds" by Wellen (needs more length).

These two are shoo-ins for the 1957 volume of *SF: the Year's Greatest* or *The Year's Best Science Fiction Stories and Novels*, though the length of the second may consign it to Miss Merrill's Honorable Mentions. The second list is:

"The World in the Juke Box" by Wellen (a real find for you).

"The Indigestible Invaders" by Knight (reminds me of one of Kuttner's older stories).

Toss between Garrett's "Stroke of Genius" and Budrys' "Lower Than Angels."

To repeat: INFINITY is the magazine of the year. Even your worst stories were at least entertaining. Also, I'd like to thank the Science and Fiction Critic's Club for supplying me with the October issue which I had missed. (I might also add that if any of you Boston fans have not yet gotten in touch with this club, do so. Fast.)—John Butterworth, 37 Richmond Rd., Belmont, Mass.

(Thanks, John. We're especially pleased to receive this kind of letter, and would like to see more lists of the five—or ten—best stories we published in our

first six issues. If we receive enough, we'll tabulate and publish the results. And for those interested, the address of the S&FC Club is 230 Clarendon St., Boston, Mass.—Ed.)

oo

I must protest!

I picked up my copy of INFINITY late this month, and so am probably late in reaching you with this protest. But your issue for October was, although good in the whole, stained with the most revolting story I have ever read. I refer of course to Mr. Knight's "The Indigestible Invaders."

Of course Swift, in his essay on the Irish, offered the same solution to the problem, but "The Indigestible Invaders"! I'm sorry but I cannot find any valid excuse for this story being written. It does not entertain, it does not offer any solution (acceptable) to any problem, and it did not really offer any new concept in Science Fiction.

If I may editorialize a little myself . . . I find that most Science Fiction tends to discount Moral or Religious tone in its present day writing. There is an attempt to scoff at religious matters (Azimov's *Foundation*) or to treat it as an evil force left over from prehistoric days (Heinlein's *Future History*

Series). Occasionally a priest or minister will be treated sympathetically but there is usually a "scientific" scoffing at religion. One of the best examples of this is Clarke's *Childhood's End*.

Many present day scientists of the highest caliber confess to being religious and daily practice their faith. St. Thomas Aquinas proved, philosophically, the existence of God, and I have yet to read a S-F writer who is a better philosopher. I believe that S-F writers need to re-examine their "professional scoffer's" attitudes towards Faith and Religion.

I'm not going to drop Science Fiction because I don't agree with some of the philosophies expressed. But I do plead with these writers to re-examine their worship of the God of Science and realize that there is something lacking in such a faith.—S/Sgt. Joseph H. Billings, AF 36478864, Hq. Sq. Sec., 5th Air Base Group, Box 249, Travis Air Force Base, Calif.

(We anticipate numerous answers to this letter, and will of course try to publish typical arguments for all beliefs. But—without taking sides ourselves—we think it only fair to warn you, Sgt. Billings, that you'd better be prepared to state specifically what it is that is lacking in a faith in the "God" of Science.—Ed.)

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